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LA BELLE NIVERNAISE
DAUDET ALPHONSE

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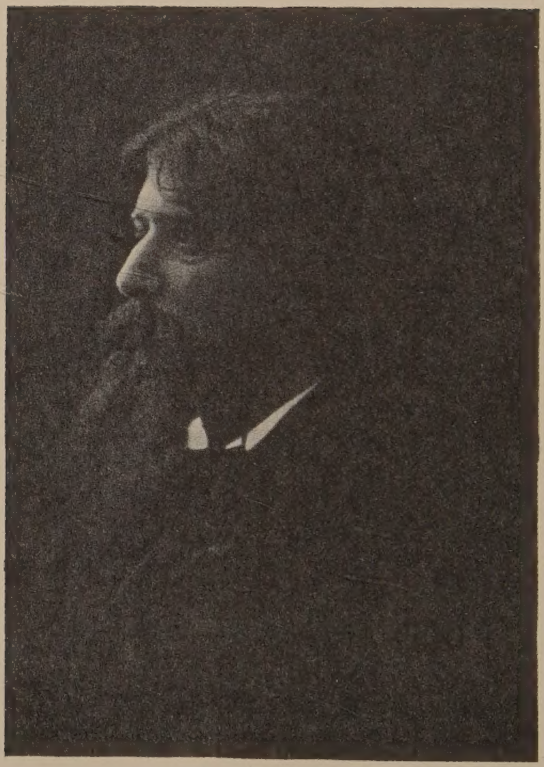

Alphonse Daudet.

ALPHONSE DAUDET

LA BELLE-NIVERNAISE

And Other Stories

FROM THE FRENCH OF ALPHONSE DAUDET

Short Story Index Reprint Series

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LA BELLE-NIVERNAISE

I

A Bold Stroke.

LA BELLE-NIVERNAISE

I

A Bold Stroke.

Rue des Enfants-Rouges, — Street of the Guardsmen, — in the Temple quarter.

A narrow street, like a ditch, stagnant gutters, puddles of black mud, mouldy and dish-watery smells effusing from the yawning alley-ways.

On each side towering houses, with barrack windows, murky panes, curtainless, — shelters for journeymen, workers on the premises, bricklayers' night-lodgers.

On the ground-floor, shops. A great many pork-butchers and wine-dealers, chestnut sellers, wholesale bakeries, a meat stall symphonic in purples and yellows.

No carriages in this street, no dressy dawdlers of either sex on the sidewalks, — but hucksters crying the refuse of the markets, and a hustle of workmen

emerging from their places of labor with their blouses rolled up under their arms.

'T is the eighth of the month, — the day when the poor tenants pay their rents, or exasperated landlords chuck them out of doors.

'T is the day when one may see a huddle of iron bedsteads, wooden tables with upturned legs, eviscerated mattresses, and kitchen utensils, carried by on hand-carts.

Not even a wisp of straw to salve the wounds of these wretched bits of crippled furniture, battered and weary from hasty journeys over squalid staircases on the road from attic to cellar.

Night falls. One by one the street lamps are lighted and cast reflections in the gutters and the

fronts of the shops. The fog is chilling. The passers-by make haste.

Leaning against the bar of a warm and cheery wine-shop, Père Louveau drinks with a carpenter from La Villette.

The big, ruddy, seamed countenance of the honest mariner expands in a laugh that shakes the rings in his ears.

"It 's this way, then, Père Dubac, — you take my cargo of timber at the figure I gave you."

"Right you are."

"Here 's to you!"

"Same to you!"

They clash glasses, and Père Louveau drinks, head thrown back, eyes half-closed, smacking his lips to get the full flavor of his white wine.

What would you have? No one is perfect, and Père Louveau's pet weakness is white wine. A sot?

Goodness, no! The good wife, who knows a thing or two, would n't have any sprees; but when one leads the life of a sailor, with feet in the water and head in the sun, one must have a glass or so now and then to keep the balance even.

And Père Louveau, waxing more and more jolly, grins at the shining zinc counter through the mist that obscures his vision, and thinks of the heap of

coins he shall pocket on the morrow, when he delivers his timber.

A final grasp of the hand, another little glass, and they go their different ways.

"To-morrow, without fail?"

"Count on me."

Yes, Père Louveau will be there, without doubt. It 's too good a bargain, and too squarely made for any one to back out now.

And the jolly sailor goes down toward the Seine, swinging his shoulders and elbowing the passers, with the exuberant delight of a school-boy out on a lark.

What will Mère Louveau say, — Mère Louveau, the woman who knows a thing or two, — when she learns that her man has sold his timber at the first try, and that the trade is shrewdly in their favor?

One or two more bargains like this, and they will be able to afford a new boat and forsake the Belle-Nivernaise, which begins to take in altogether too much water.

No blame to her, of course, for she has been a fine craft in her day, but, as every one knows, the

longer in years, the worse for wear; and Père Louveau himself feels that he is not as frisky as he was in the days when he filled the post of "little skipper" among the lumbermen of the Marne.

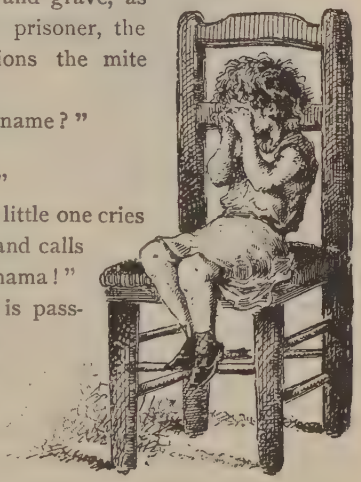
But what is going on, over there? Women are gathering around a door, people stop and talk, and a policeman, prominent in the midst of the group, writes in his note-book.

Our sailor, urged by curiosity, crosses the street, like everybody else, asking, "What's the row?"

A wounded dog, probably, or a disabled vehicle,

or a drunkard fallen in the gutter, — nothing especially novel.

No, — a little boy, seated on a wooden chair, hair rumpled, cheeks full of sweetmeats, and rubbing his eyes with his fists. He is crying, and the tears in their downward course trace grotesque lines on his poor, dirty face.



Imperturbable and grave, as if interrogating a prisoner, the policeman questions the mite and takes notes.

"What is your name?"

"Totor."

"Victor what?"

No reply. The little one cries harder than ever, and calls aloud, "Mama, mama!"

A woman who is passing — a woman of the slums, very ugly, very dirty, dragging two children after her — emerges from the group and says to the policeman, —

"Let me try."

She kneels down, wipes the nose and eyes of the waif, kisses his sticky cheeks, and asks, —

"What was your mama's name, my dear?"

The dear does not know. The policeman addresses himself to the bystanders.

"See here, the concierge ought to know something about these people."

The concierge is ignorant even of the name, so many people live in that house. All that anybody knows is that the family had been living there for a month, that they did n't pay a sou, that the landlord had just put them out, and that it was a good riddance.

"What did they do?"

"Nothing."

The father and mother spent their days in drinking and their nights in fighting. They never stopped except to thrash their two older boys, who begged in the streets and stole from the stalls. Altogether quite a model family.

"Do you think they will come back after the child?"

"Certainly not!"

They took advantage of the eviction to lose him. This was not the first time such a thing had happened on rent-day.

"No one saw them when they went away?" demanded the policeman.

They went away that morning, the man pushing a cart, the woman carrying an apronful of stuff, and the two boys with their hands in their pockets. Catch them if you can. The people said hard words about the fugitives and went on their way.

The child had been there since morning. His mother had put him in the chair and said, "Keep quiet."

He had tried to keep quiet. When he cried from hunger, the woman who had charge of the fruit-stand opposite gave him a jam-tart.

But the tart could not last forever, and so he began to cry again. He cried now because he was afraid, poor little chap! He was afraid of the dogs that prowled about him, of the coming night, of the strange persons who spoke to him, and his tiny heart throbbed fiercely in his breast, like the heart of a frightened bird.

The crowd increased and the policeman took him by the hand to lead him to the station.

"Well, no one claims him?"

"Hold on there!"

Everybody turned around. They beheld a big, jolly face, grinning stupidly to the ears adorned with copper rings.

"Hold on! If nobody wants him, I'll take him — I."

The crowd uttered exclamations: "Good enough!" "That 's well done!" "You 're a man worth knowing."

Père Louveau, his sympathies fired by the white wine, the success of his bargain, and this chorus of approbation, stood with folded arms in the midst of the crowd.

"Oh, come, now! It 's a very simple matter."

Then the more curious ones followed with him to the police station, still warm in their praise. At the station he was, according to custom, subjected to a series of questions.

"Your name?"

"François Louveau, Mr. Commissary, a married man, and well married, though I say it, with a wife who is about as smart as they make 'em. It was a fine thing for me, Mr. Commissary, because I 'm a trifle slow in my wits, — just a trifle slow, you see. Ho, ho, ho! No, I 'm not a very lively bird. 'François is not an eagle,' as my woman says."

He had never been so eloquent before. His tongue was unlimbered, and he had the assurance of a man who has made a good trade and drunk a bottle of white wine.

"Your occupation?"

"Sailor, Mr. Commissary, — cap'n of the *Belle-Nivernaise*, a hard-featured craft, handled by a dandy crew. Ha, ha! — famous, that crew! Ask the lock-keepers between the Pont Marie and Clamecy. Ever been there, Mr. Commissary, at Clamecy?"

The by-standers smiled broadly, and Père Louveau went on, mouthing his words and stammering a little.

"Great place, Clamecy, I tell you! Plenty of timber, too, — fine, workable timber, all the carpenters know that. It 's the place where I buy it, all standing. Ha, ha! I 'm noted for my clever cut-

tings. I have an eye for that sort of thing. Not that I am sharp, — as the wife says, I 'm not an eagle, but I know my business. So I just pick out a tree, about as big around as you are, — saving your presence, Mr. Commissary, — I take a turn around it with a bit of cord, like this — "

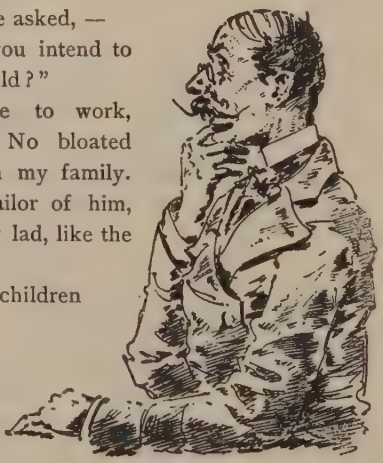
He seized the policeman and caught him about the waist with a piece of twine which he had taken from his pocket. The policeman drew back.

"There, no more of that."

"But, yes; but, yes! I want Mr. Commissary to

see. I take a turn like this, and then, when I have measured it, I multiply — I multiply — well, I forget what I multiply by. My wife knows how to make those calculations. Tell you what, she 's got a head ! "

The audience enjoyed the show hugely, and even the commissary deigned to smile behind his desk. When the mirth had subsided a little, he asked, —



" What do you intend to do with that child ? "

" He 'll have to work, that 's sure. No bloated bondholders in my family. I 'll make a sailor of him, an honest sailor lad, like the others."

" You have children of your own ? "

" Now you 're talking ! One that walks, and one at the breast, and another one coming. Not bad, is it, for a dull-witted chap like me ? This one 'll make four, but what 's the odds ? If there 's enough for three, there 's enough for four. We 'll squeeze a little closer. We 'll

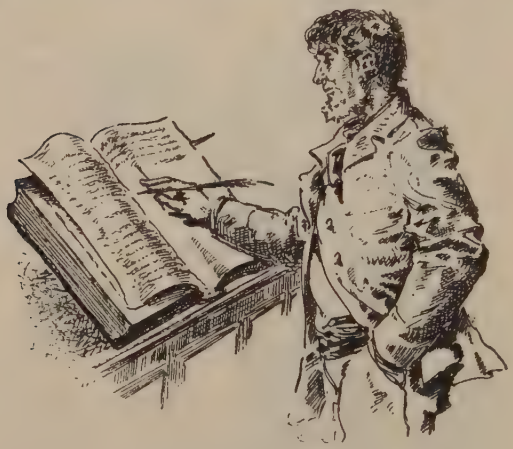
pull in our belts and charge a little more for our timber."

And the rings in his ears swung to and fro, shaken by his hearty laughter as he cast a self-satisfied look over the spectators.

A big book was placed in front of him. As he did not know how to write, he made his mark at the bottom of the page. Then the commissary formally delivered the child into his charge.

"Take the little one, François Louveau, and bring

him up well. If I learn anything with regard to his history, I will let you know. But it is not probable that his parents will ever reclaim him. For your part, you have the appearance of an honest man,



and I rely on you. Always do as your wife says. Good-by. Don't make too free with the white wine."

Night, the chilling fog, the indifferent hustling of people bent on getting quickly home, — all this has a sobering influence.

Once fairly in the street, alone, with the stamped document in his pocket and his ward by the hand,

the amiable man suddenly felt his enthusiasm oozing away. The real significance of his action became clear to him.

Why could he not have more sense? Why must he always play the fool and the braggart? He could not even walk through the streets like other people without meddling with things that did n't concern him.

The wrath of Mère Louveau loomed large before him! What a welcome there would be for him, — great heavens, what a welcome! A woman who knows a thing or two has her terrors for a poor chap who wears his heart on his sleeve.

He did n't dare to go home. He did n't dare go back to the commissary. What should he do? What should he do?

They wandered on together through the fog, Louveau gesticulating, talking to himself, preparing an argument. Victor dragged his feet in the mud; they were heavy as lead; he could walk no further.

Then Père Louveau stopped, lifted him to his breast, and wrapped him up in his over-jacket. The

clasp of the tiny arms about his neck gave him a moiety of courage. He went on his way. Deuce take it all, come what will, he proposes to make a try for it, anyhow.

If Mère Louveau drives them ashore it will be time enough to take the child back to the police. Perhaps, however, he will be permitted to stay over night, and that will mean one square meal for him.

They arrived at the Austerlitz bridge, where the *Belle-Nivernaise* had her moorings. The stale mild odor of cargoes of freshly cut wood pervaded the darkness. A flotilla of boats rocked gently on the dark bosom of the river, swinging their lanterns back and forth and grating their intermingled chains.

To reach his vessel Père Louveau had to cross two barges united by gang-planks. He went on with careful tread, his knees shaking, and the infant's grasp making him labor for breath.

How dark it was! Only a lamp shining through the cabin window and a ray of light creeping from

beneath the door showed that there was life on board the *Belle-Nivernaise.*

The voice of Mère Louveau was audible as she scolded the children and supervised the cooking.

"Clara, do keep still!"

It was no time to draw back. The skipper pushed open the door. Mère Louveau had her face turned away as she stooped over the saucepan, but she had recognized his step and said without turning around, —

"So it's you, François? Well, you've been long enough gone!"

The potatoes hissed in the bubbling fat, and the steam from the kettle near the open door dimmed the cabin windows.

François put the child down, and the poor little chap, responding to the genial influence of his surroundings, spread out his tiny red fingers. He smiled, and his flute like voice said, —

" It 's warm."

Mère Louveau whisked about. Indicating the ragged child standing there in the middle of the room, she demanded in an angry tone, —

" What 's that ? "

Alas, such moments arrive in the best managed families. The skipper laughed to his ears just to

keep himself in countenance, but he would have given a good deal to be back in the streets again.

"A surprise! He, he! A surprise!"

And as his wife, awaiting an explanation, confronted him with terror-inspiring gaze, he stammered out the whole story, with the supplicating eyes of a dog threatened with punishment.

"His parents had deserted him. I found him crying in the street. They said, 'Does anybody want him?' I said, 'Yes, I'll take him.' And the commissary said, 'Take him.' Ain't it so, little chap?"

Then the wrath of Mère Louveau burst forth.

"You're crazy, or else you've been drinking too much! Did any one ever hear the like of such folly? Do you want us all to starve? Do you think we're getting too well off? Have we got too much

bread to eat? Have we got more places to sleep in than we know what to do with?"

François gazed at the toes of his shoes and did not reply.

"Look me in the eye, now, if you can! Your boat leaks like a skimmer, and here you go amus-

ing yourself by picking up children out of the gutters!"

He had said all that to himself, poor man. He could make no reply. He hung his head like a victim waiting for sacrifice.

"You will do me the favor of taking this child back to the commissary."

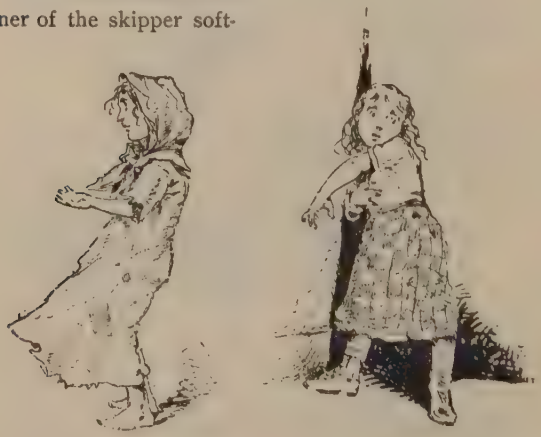
If he made any attempt at a protest he knew it would be the worse for him.

"Do you understand?"

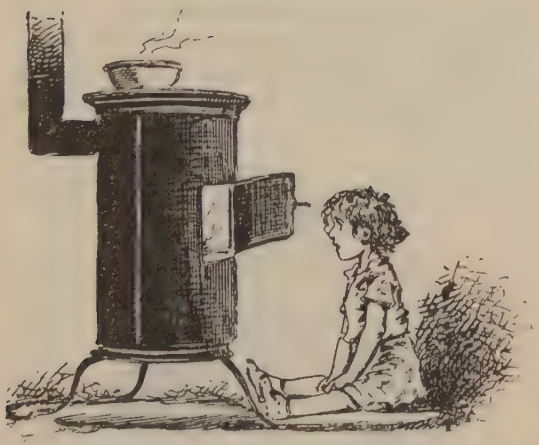
She moved toward him, the frying-pan in her hand, with a threatening gesture. François promised to follow her wishes.

"See here, don't get mad. I thought I was doing all right. I see that I was wrong. That's all. Better take him back now?"

The submissive manner of the skipper soft-



ened the heart of Mère Louveau. Perhaps she also had a vision of one of her own children, all alone in the darkness and beseeching the passers-by for



aid. She turned to put the pan again on the fire, and said in a gruff tone, —

"You can't take him back to-night; the station 'll be closed. And now that you 've brought him here, you can't put him out in the street. We 'll keep him to-night; but to-morrow morning" Mère Louveau was so wrathful that she poked the fire with all her might — "but to-morrow morning, you bet your life you 'll get him away from here!"

Conversation languished. The good woman set the table with a great deal of unnecessary noise, clashing the dishes together, and throwing about the knives and forks.

Clara was frightened and shrank into a corner. The baby grunted on the bed, and the new-comer gazed with rapture at the glowing coals. Probably he had never seen a fire before since he was born.

Another joy seized him when he found himself at table with a bib around his neck and a heap of potatoes on his plate.

He ate like a robin to whom some one casts a handful of crumbs in winter. Mère Louveau served him brusquely, though not a little touched by his evident need of food. Clara, quite overcome with delight, stroked him with her spoon. Louveau sat in a daze, and did not venture to raise his eyes.

The table cleared, her children put to bed, Mère Louveau sat down by the fire with the waif on her knees, intent on cleaning him up.

"Can't put him to bed, dirty as this."

I 'll wager he had never before seen a sponge or a comb. He spun like a top under her hands. And in truth, once washed and combed, he was n't bad-looking, poor little chap, with his rosy pug nose and his chubby fists. Mère Louveau surveyed the results of her labors with some degree of satisfaction.

"How old should you say he is?"

François took his pipe from his mouth, highly gratified to find himself once more noticed. It was the first time he had been spoken to all the evening, and a question foreshadowed a possible return of favor. He got up and took his cord from his pocket.

"How old? He, he! We 'll find out."

He held the child with his arms at his side and wound the cord about him as if he had been a Clamecy tree. Mère Louveau looked at him in astonishment.

"What on earth are you doing?"

"Taking his measure, begad."

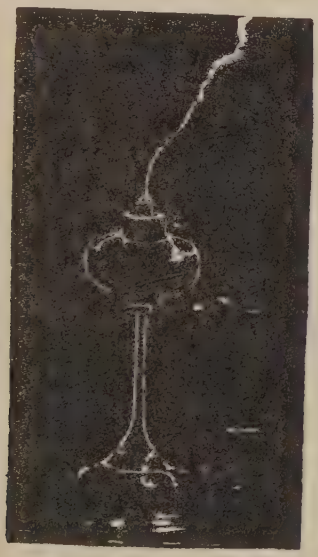
She snatched the cord from his hands and threw it to the other side of the room.

"Man alive, what a fool you are with your measurings! A child is not a staddle!"

No more chance that night for poor François.

He beat a retreat, overcome with shame, while Mère Louveau put the waif in the crib with Clara.

The lassie slept soundly in the middle of the cot, her tiny hands doubled up. She had a vague con-



sciousness of something being put in by her, thrust out her arms, pushed her companion to one side, stuck her elbows into his face, turned over, and went to sleep.

The lamp was extinguished. The Seine, splashing around the boat, rocked the craft gently. The waif felt a grateful warmth pervade him, and he sank softly into dreamland with the unwonted sensation of a caressing hand upon his head as his eyes closed.

II

The Belle-Nivernaise.

II

The Belle-Nivernaise.

Miss Clara was in the habit of waking up at an early hour. She was astonished, on this particular

morning, not to see her mother in the cabin, and to find another head beside her own on the pillow.

She rubbed her eyes with her small fists, seized her bedfellow by the hair, and shook him.

Poor Totor awoke to unwonted tortures, in the grasp of mischievous fingers which twined about his neck and took him by the nose.

He looked around him in surprise, and found that what he had thought to be a dream was still true.

Footsteps creaked overhead. They were unloading timber on to the dock and making a lot of noise about it.

Miss Clara seemed to be greatly puzzled. She lifted one little finger in the air and pointed to the deck as if asking, —

"What is going on out there?"

The delivery of the cargo had begun. Dubac, the carpenter from La Villette, had arrived at six o'clock, with his horse and cart, and Père Louveau had set at work in so hearty a fashion that he hardly knew himself.

The honest fellow had not closed his eyes all night through thinking of the task of returning to

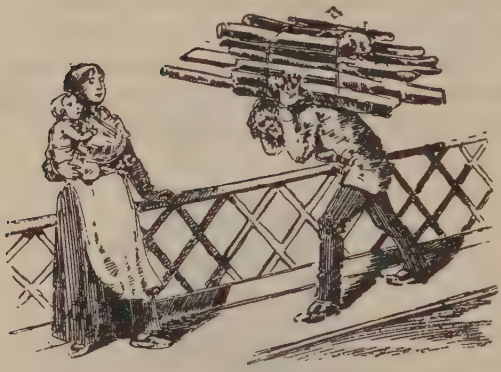
the commissary a child that had suffered from cold and hunger.

He expected that there would be another scene in the morning, but Mère Louveau had other matters in her head, for she did not speak of Victor.

François felt that he gained something the longer he could put off the critical moment. He did his best to court oblivion by keeping out of the sight of his wife, and working at the top of his speed, lest Mère Louveau, seeing him idle, should exclaim, —

"See here! If you have n't anything else to do, you can take that brat back where you got him from."

So he toiled on. The pile of timber diminished rapidly. Dubac had already made three trips, and Mère Louveau, standing in the gangway with her baby on her arm, kept tally of the unloading.



In the zeal of his secret hopes François picked out the biggest planks — planks as long as a ship's spar and as thick as the wall of a house.

When the piece was too much for him he called on the Crew for help. The Crew was a sailor with a wooden leg who made up the entire supplementary force on board the *Belle-Nivernaise*. They had taken him out of pity and kept him through habit.

The disabled mariner leaned over on his peg, lifted the weight with great effort, and Louveau, bending under his burden, his belt tight pulled about his hips, went slowly down the gang-plank.

Disturb a man as busy as that? Mère Louveau would n't think of such a thing. She paced back and forth along the deck, occupied with Mimile,

who was having his breakfast. Always thirsty, Mimile! Like his father!

Louveau thirsty? Not to-day, at all events. They had been at it since early morning, and there had been no question yet of white wine. They had

only paused long enough to puff, mop their foreheads, and drink what they could get. Why, a short time ago, when Dubac had proposed that they take a turn on shore and have something, François had responded, heroically, —

"By and by. No time now."

Refused to take anything! Mère Louveau could n't understand that at all. She certainly must have changed her good man for some other.

She must have changed Clara, too, for it was eleven o'clock, and the little maiden, who would never stay in bed after daylight, had not yet shown herself.

Mère Louveau went down the companion-way at full speed to see what the trouble was. François stood on the dock, arms swinging, and feeling as if he had got a blow in the stomach.

The game's up. His wife has remembered Victor. She will bring him up with her, and he will have to go back to the police-station.

But no. Mère Louveau comes up alone, laughing, and she makes a sign for the skipper to follow her.

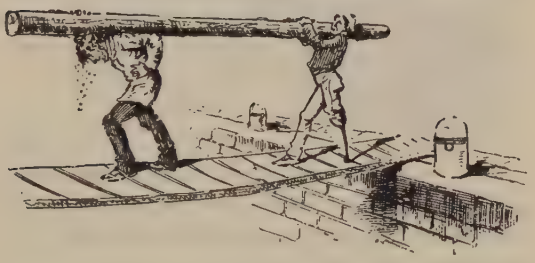
"Just look here. Funniest thing you ever saw!"

The honest fellow understands not in the least this sudden attack of hilarity, and he follows her like an automaton, his legs stiffened in the stress of his emotion.

The two kids were sitting on the edge of the bed, in their night-clothes, and with bare feet. Between them they had the bowl of soup which the mother, on getting up, had put within their reach.

Having but one spoon for two mouths, they took turns at being fed, after the manner of fledglings in the nest, and Clara, who always had her own way of taking her soup, held her lips to the spoon and laughed.

They had put bread in each others eyes and ears, but they had broken nothing and upset nothing,



and the two doll-creatures were having such a good time that one could not possibly be angry with them. Mère Louveau was still laughing.

"They 're getting along so well that it 's plain we don't need to worry about them."

François went back to his work, delighted with the turn that things had taken. Ordinarily on unloading days he took a rest in the afternoon, that is to say, he prowled through all the sailors' wine-shops from the Point-du-Jour to the Quai de Bercy. The consequence was that the unloading dragged

along over the greater part of a week, and Mère Louveau had a chance to get plenty of fresh air.

But this time, no wine, no loitering, a manifest desire to accomplish what was to be done, a disposition for energetic and uninterrupted toil.

For his part, as if he understood that he must work out his own salvation, the waif did the best he could to entertain Clara.

For the first time in her life this young lady passed the day without shedding tears, bumping her head, or wearing holes in her stockings. Her comrade kept her amused and took the best care of her.

He was always ready to sacrifice his hair to check the tears that might be swimming on the edge of Clara's eyelids. And she would grasp his shaggy pate with both hands and tease him like a pug worrying a wool poodle.

Mère Louveau saw all this from a distance, and she said to herself that the little boy was pretty good-natured. On the whole, they would keep Victor till the cargo was off. There would be time enough to take him back before they got away on their next trip.

And so that night she made no allusion to the departure of the child, heaped his plate with potatoes, and put him to bed as she had the night preceding.

One might almost imagine that François's ward had already become a part of the family, and seeing Clara clasp her arm around his neck when she went to sleep, it began to look as if the daughter of the house had taken him under her especial protection.

It took three days to unload the *Belle-Nivernaise*, — three days of hard work without a moment's relaxation or a break. One noon the last cart-load was piled up and the boat was empty.

They could n't get their tow till the next day, and François spent the afternoon cleaning up 'tween-decks, haunted by a phrase which for three days had been buzzing in his ears, —

"Take him back to the commissary."

Ah, that commissary! He was not less redoubt-

able in the cabin of the *Belle-Nivernaise* than in the house of Mr. Punch. He had become a sort of bugaboo employed by Mère Louveau to enforce good behavior on the part of Clara.

Every time she spoke the dreaded name the little waif looked at her with the uneasy glances of a

child that has known fear and pain. Vaguely he understood that the name meant for him potential unpleasantness.

The commissary! That meant no more Clara, no more caresses, no more fire, no more potatoes. It meant a return to dirty lodgings, days without food, sleep without a bed, awakenings without

kisses. And so, when he clutched the skirts of Mère Louveau the eve of their departure as François asked in a tremulous voice, —

"Well, shall we take him back, or not?" —

Mère Louveau did not make any reply. One would have said that she was trying to think of some excuse for keeping Victor.

As for Clara, she rolled on the deck, suffocated with tears and deciding to go into convulsions if they attempted to separate her from her comrade. Mère Louveau finally spoke, seriously, —

" François, you have done a very stupid thing — as you always do. Now we must take the consequences. The child has become attached to us, Clara is charmed with him, and it would trouble us all to see him go away. I should like to keep him, but I 'm going to make two conditions, — the first time Clara has conniptions or you get boozy, I 'll take him myself to the commissary."

Père Louveau beamed all over. It was all right. He would n't drink any more. He laughed till his earrings shook and chanted aloud on deck as he coiled up his mooring-line, while the tug took the *Belle-Nivernaise* and a whole flotilla of boats into tow.

III

Voyaging.

III

Voyaging.

Victor was on the way. On the way to the suburbs, mirroring their houses and gardens in the placid water. On the way to the land of white, chalky hills. On the way by paved and echoing tow-paths. On the way to the highlands, where the Yonne canal sleeps in its quiet locks. On the way to green fields and the woods of Morvan!

Leaning over the tiller and wrapped up in his determination not to drink, François turned a deaf ear to the pressing invitations of lock-keepers and wine-sellers, who beheld with astonishment his indifferent migration. He had to keep close hold of the tiller to prevent the *Belle-Nivernaise* from nosing up to the taverns. The old craft had been over the route so many times that she knew all the stopping-places and drew up of her own accord like an omnibus horse.

At the bow, perched on one foot, the Crew manipulated a long pole, clearing away the grass, fending off at the bends, and keeping a free course through the locks.

He never made much fuss about anything, although the thump of his wooden leg sounded day and night along the deck. A silent and unassertive

creature, he was one of those for whom the whole current of life goes wrong.

At school a playfellow put out one of his eyes, at the saw-mill an axe had taken off his foot, at the refinery a vat scalded him.

He would have been a beggar, dying of hunger in a ditch, if Louveau, with his kindly sagacity, had not solicited his services as he came from the hospital, to aid in the navigation of the *Belle-Nivernaise.*

That also had been the occasion of a lively quarrel, — exactly as in the case of Victor. Mère Louveau had been angry. Louveau had been mild as milk. And the Crew had remained. At present, in common with the cat and the crow, he made part of the menagerie.

Père Louveau steered so adroitly, and the Crew kept her head so clear, that twelve days after leaving Paris the *Belle-Nivernaise*, having ascended river and canals, came to her moorings at the bridge at Corbigny, there to sleep peacefully away her winter's rest.

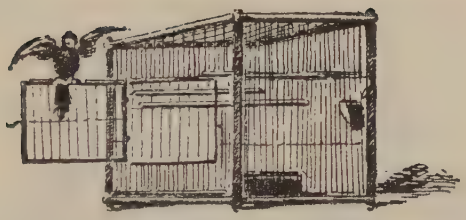
From December to the end of February, the boatmen make no trips. They make repairs and search the forests to buy timber for the spring cuttings. As wood is cheap they keep good fires in the cabins, and if the

autumn ventures have been profitable, this period is one of joyful repose.

They made all snug on the *Belle-Nivernaise* for the hibernation, — that is, they unshipped the rudder, stowed the jury-mast 'tween-decks, and left the whole upper deck clear for games and romping.

What a change for the waif! Throughout the entire voyage he had been dazed and frightened. He acted like a bird released from its cage, astonished at its freedom, and forgetting for the time being its song and the use of its wings.

Too young to be attracted by the landscape deployed before his eyes, he had not failed to be impressed by the ascent of the river between the



shifting horizons. Mère Louveau thought him sullen and taciturn, and from morning to night she would say, —

"Here 's the deaf-mute!"

But this little Parisian from the Temple quarter was anything save mute. When he once understood that he was not dreaming, that he should no more return to his former dwelling in the slums, and that in spite of Mère Louveau's threats he had nothing serious to fear from the commissary, then his tiny tongue was loosened.

It was like the blossoming of some neglected plant, taken from a cellar and put out in the air and sunshine. He no longer shrank into corners with the terror of a hunted animal. His eyes beneath his rounded forehead lost their unquiet glance, and although he continued to be of pale and serious countenance, he learned to laugh with Clara.

The bit lassie was passionately attached to her comrade and exercised to the full the pleasure in

which love consists at her age, — that of quarrelling and making up again. She was headstrong as a little mule, but she had a tender heart, and the mere mention of the commissary was enough to reduce her to obedience.

They had not been long at Corbigny when another little girl came to live with them. Mimile was then just eighteen months old, and so there was another cradle in the cabin and some extra care, for with the expenses that they had they could not hire a servant.

Mère Louveau scolded till the Crew's wooden leg

shook. But they got no pity from the people who knew them. The peasants did not even stand on ceremony in saying what they thought of the priest for quoting the skipper as an example.

"That ain't sensible, what you say, your reverence. When you've got three kids of your own you don't go scratching round after more. But the Louveaus are always like that. It's their vanity that carries 'em away, and all the good advice in the world won't change 'em."

They did n't wish the Louveaus any evil, but they were not sorry to see them get a sound lesson.

The priest was an honest man without a spark of malice in his nature and who readily adjusted his views to the opinions of others. He wound up by

recalling a passage of Scripture and a sentiment from the Fathers to fortify his sudden alteration of mind.

"My parishioners are right," he said, stroking his badly shaven chin. "One must not tempt Providence."

But as, when all was said, the Louveaus were decent sort of people, he did not omit them from the round of his usual pastoral visits.

He found Mère Louveau cutting some breeches for Victor out of an old jacket, for the little chap had arrived without personal baggage, and the thrifty housewife could n't be contented to see any of her brood in rags.

She placed a chair for the priest, and when he spoke of Victor, intimating that possibly with the assistance of the bishop they might get the boy into the orphanage at Autun, Mère Louveau, who was always frank of speech with everybody, replied brusquely, —

"The little one is a burden on us, that 's very true, your Reverence, and François, in bringing him here, proved once more that he is none too wise.

"My heart is as tender as his, and if I had found Victor I should have pitied him, but I should have left him where he was.

"But now that we have him, we must make the best of it, and if by and by we find ourselves on short commons on his account, we sha'n't ask charity of any one."

At this moment Victor entered the cabin, carrying Mimile in his arms. The youngster, furious at being weaned, revenged himself by refusing to stand or walk. He was getting his teeth and gnawed at everything.

Moved by the spectacle, the priest put his hand on the head of the waif and said solemnly, —

"The blessing of Heaven rests upon big families."

And he went away delighted at having selected a phrase so appropriate to the occasion.

Mère Louveau had not spoken amiss when she had said that Victor was now one of the family. In spite of her scolding and her frequent threats of

returning him to the commissary, the shrewd woman had become attached to the pale-faced lad at her skirts. When Louveau objected that they were making too much of him, she invariably replied, —

"It was n't necessary to take him."

When he was seven years old, she sent him to school with Clara. He it was who always carried the lunch-basket and the books, and he fought

valiantly to defend their luncheon against the unscrupulous appetite of youthful marauders.

He was no less energetic at study than at fighting, and although his school attendance was confined to winter, when they were not making trips, he knew

more at the end of a year than the little dull-witted peasants who stammered over their a-b-c's twelve months running.

Victor and Clara always returned from school through the forest. The two children found pleasure in watching the choppers bring down the trees. As Victor was light and handy, they got him to climb to the tops of the doomed trees and make fast the line for pulling them over. He seemed to become smaller and smaller as he went up, and when he arrived at the top Clara was greatly frightened. But he, not disinclined to show off a little, balanced himself adroitly, just to tease her.

Sometimes he went to see Mr. Maugendre at his shop. Mr. Maugendre was the carpenter, and he was thin and dry, like a stave. He lived alone, outside the village, right in the woods. He did not seem to have any intimates.

The curiosity of the villagers had long been baffled by the solitude and silence of this stranger

who had come from the interior of Nièvre and set up his shop away from everybody.

For six years he had worked steadily, like one in need, without ever allowing himself a holiday, al-

though he was reputed to have lots of "stuff," made big contracts, and often went to consult the notary at Corbigny regarding the investment of his savings.

One day he told the priest that he was a widower. That was all anybody knew about him.

When Maugendre saw the children coming he put aside his saw and dropped his work to talk with them.

He was much taken with Victor, and had taught him to model boats from bits of wood. Once the carpenter said, —

"You make me think of a child I lost." And then, as if he feared having said too much, he added, "But that was a long, long time ago." Another time he said to Père Louveau: "If you want to find a home for Victor at any time, turn him over to me. I have no relations, I 'll do my best by him. I 'll send him to town and have him educated.

Then he can pass the examinations and enter the School of Forestry."

But François, being yet in the first flush of a generous action, refused, and Maugendre waited patiently till the progressive increase of the Louveau family, or some need of money, should make the skipper regret his experiment.

Destiny seemed favorable to Maugendre's wishes, for one could almost believe that misfortune had embarked on the *Belle-Nivernaise* with Victor. From that moment everything went wrong. The timber did not sell well, the Crew invariably damaged an arm or leg on the eve of the unloadings, and finally one fine day, as they were about to set out for Paris, Mère Louveau fell ill.

In the midst of the lamentations of the children François lost his head. He mixed up the soup with his wife's barley-gruel, and he worried the invalid so much by his stupidity that he finally gave over the care of her to Victor.

For the first time in his life the skipper bought

his timber unassisted. In vain he wound strings about the trees and tried over and over again to get the right measurement. He always went wrong in his calculations. You remember those famous calculations. "I multiply by — I multiply by —" and only Mère Louveau knew by what!

He gave the order at haphazard, set out for Paris in great disquietude of mind, and fell in with a dishonest purchaser who profited by the circumstances to do him up. He came back to the boat with a swelling heart, sat down at the foot of the bed, and said in a melancholy voice, —

"If you don't get well pretty soon, old girl, it's all over with the rest of us."

Mère Louveau recovered slowly. She struggled bravely against misfortune and resorted to incredible means to make both ends meet.

If they had had money enough to buy a new boat, they would have been able to go on with the business; but all their little savings had gone during Mère Louveau's illness, and their profits were not

sufficient to patch up the decrepit *Belle-Nivernaise*, which was now really past mending.

Victor became a heavy burden to them. He was no longer the four-year-old who could be clothed in a blouse and fed on what the others left. He was now twelve years old; he ate as much as a man, although he was very slender, all nerves; and they could not bring themselves to put him in the place of the Crew when that member of the ship's company got himself smashed.

Everything went from bad to worse. They had the greatest difficulty, during the last trip, in getting up the Seine to Clamecy. The *Belle-Nivernaise* leaked like a sieve. Repairs were out of the question unless they practically rebuilt the whole hull, and it would be cheaper to abandon her and get another boat.

One March night, — it was the eve of a trip to Paris, — as Louveau sorrowfully took leave of Maugendre, after having settled his account for timber, the carpenter volunteered to go home with him, saying that they would have a bottle together.

"There 's something I want to talk to you about, François."

They entered the cabin. Maugendre filled the glasses, and they sat down opposite one another.

"I have n't always been alone, Louveau, as you see me now. I can remember a time when I had every-

thing to make me happy, — plenty to live on and a wife that I was very fond of. I lost it all, and by my own fault."

The carpenter paused. The confession he was about to make seemed to stick in his throat.

"I 've never been what you could call a wicked man, François, but I had one failing — "

"You ? "

"Yes, and I 've got it yet. I 'm too fond of putting by the dollars. That 's been the cause of all my unhappiness."

"How 's that, Maugendre ? "

"I 'm going to tell you how. After we were married and my wife had her baby, I thought it would be a great thing if she could go up to Paris and get a place as nurse. That pays well when the husband has a trade and can keep house by himself. My wife did n't want to leave the kid. She said to me, —

"'See here, my man, we 're getting money enough as it is. If we 're too grasping we shall lose by it in the end, – – the extra money won 't be of any good to us. Your idea 's all very well when there are too many children to feed. Let 's give it up. I don't want to leave you.' But I would n't listen to her, Louveau. I made her go away."

"Well?"

"Well, when my wife had found a place, she gave her baby to an old woman to be taken back into the country. She went with them to the railway station. From that time to this, it has been impossible to get any trace of that child."

"Poor Maugendre! And the wife?"

"When she heard that the child was lost, it turned her milk. She died."

They were both silent, — Louveau touched by what he had just heard, Maugendre overcome with his emotions. The carpenter spoke first, —

"To punish myself, I lead the life you see. For twelve years I have kept away from everybody. I can't live this way any longer. I don't want to die a hermit. Take pity on me, old fellow, and let me have Victor to make good the child I lost."

Louveau was very much perplexed. Victor had cost them a neat little sum. If they gave him up just at the point when he was likely to be of use to them, they would forfeit, in one sense, all they had done for him. Maugendre understood the drift of his thoughts.

"It's in the bargain, François, that if you let me have him, I'm to make up to you all the expense you have been to on his account. It will be a good thing for the lad, too. I never see the forestry pupils in the woods that I don't say to myself: 'I could make my boy as much of a gentleman as any of them.' Victor is smart and quick, and I like him. You know well enough that I'd treat him as if he was my own son. What do you say? Is it a bargain?"

They talked it all over that night, after the children had been put to bed, in the cabin of the *Belle-Nivernaise*. The skipper's wife argued in this fashion, —

"You see, François, we've done all we could for the little chap, and Heaven knows we'd like to hold on to him. But now that the chance comes to give him up without making him unhappy, we must try to face the question squarely."

In spite of themselves their eyes wandered to the bed where Victor and Mimile slept the calm and profound sleep of childhood.

"Poor little chap!" said François, softly.

The river splashed along the boat's side, and from time to time they heard in the distance the whistle of a locomotive rending the darkness. Mère Louveau broke into sobs, —

"May God have mercy on us, François. I 'm going to keep him."

IV

It's a Hard Life.

IV

It's a Hard Life.

VICTOR was in his fifteenth year. He had run up all of a sudden, the pale stripling becoming a sturdy youth with broad shoulders and quiet manners.

From the time that he began to voyage back and forth on the *Belle-Nivernaise*, he began to learn the course, observing the shoals, taking note of the changes in the height of the water, and alternating between fending off at the bow and handling the tiller. He wore a loose jacket and had a red belt around his hips.

When Père Louveau gave up the helm to him, Clara, now a big girl, would come and knit close by, glancing admiringly at his impassive face and vigorous movements.

On this particular trip the passage from Corbigny to Paris was a hard one. Swollen with the autumnal rains, the Seine had overleaped its barriers, and swept down toward the ocean like a monster escaped from captivity.

The boatmen hastened their unloadings, for the water was already on a level with the quays, and

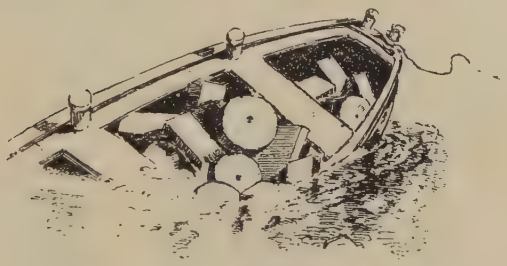
the despatches sent in hourly from the locks carried evil tidings. The water was over the embankments, the low lands were flooded, and still the level went on rising, rising.

The quays were invaded by a bustling throng,—a swarm of men, carts, and horses; overhead the great arms of the steam-cranes swung to and fro.

The wine-market was emptied. Cases of sugar were carried off on trucks. The longshoremen left their quarters. The quays were soon forsaken. And a line of trucks, mounting the slope, fled from the flood like a retreating army.

Hindered by the force of the current and the moonless nights, the Louveaus despaired of getting their timber disposed of in time. All took a hand at the task, and they toiled late by the light of the lamps on the quay and a few lanterns.

By eleven o'clock the whole cargo was piled up at the foot of the parapet. As Dubac's cart did not reappear, they all turned in.



It was a terrible night, filled with the grating of chains, the creaking of timbers, the shock of boat against boat.

The *Belle-Nivernaise*, racked by the strains to which she was subjected, groaned like a creature in torment.

No one could sleep. Père Louveau, his wife, Victor, and the Crew arose at dawn, leaving the children in bed.

The Seine had risen higher and higher during the night. Rolling by in long waves, like the sea, it ran green under the lowering skies.

On the quays there were no signs of life. Not a boat ventured out on the wild stream. But fragments of roofs and the sides of buildings were swept

along with the current. Over the bridges the silhouette of Notre-Dame was charcoaled on the fog.

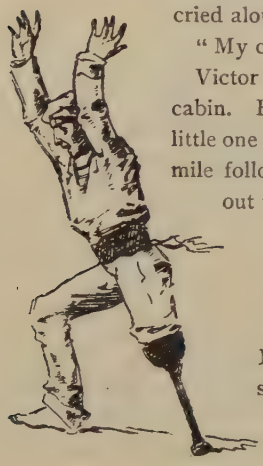
Not a moment was to be lost, for the water was

already over the parapet of the lower landing, and the waves, dashing along the face, had begun to upheave the timber.

Knee-deep in water, François, Mère Louveau, and Dubac loaded the cart. Suddenly a great noise near by startled them.

A barge, loaded with mill-stones, had crashed into the quay and split open from cut-water to stern-post. There was a horrible rending sound and a whirlpool formed.

As they stood motionless, terrified by the spectacle, they heard a clamor behind them. Cut loose by the shock, the *Belle-Nivernaise* was drifting away from the quay. Mère Louveau cried aloud, —



"My children!"

Victor had already sprung into the cabin. He re-appeared on deck, the little one in his arms. Clara and Mimile followed him, and all stretched out their arms toward the quay.

"Get them!"

"A skiff!"

"A line!"

What was to be done? No way of passing that swirl of waters. The Crew ran from one side to the other, helpless and distracted.

They must make a landing at any cost. Left with the frightened cripple and the sobbing children, Victor assumed command and determined to do all he could to save them.

"Hey, there," he shouted; "throw us a line! Look sharp! Be lively!"

Three times the line was cast, but the *Belle-Nivernaise* was too far from the quay. The line

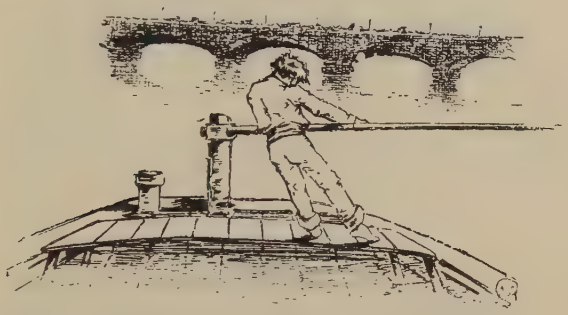
each time fell short. Then Victor ran to the helm, and they heard him shout, —

"Don't worry! I 'll take care of 'em!"

With a sweep of the tiller he headed the craft down-stream, whither she had been drifting broad-side on.

Louveau, on the quay, completely lost his wits. He tried to throw himself into the river with the idea of swimming out to his children, but Dubac grabbed him around the waist, while Mère Louveau covered her face with her hands, fearing to look longer.

Meanwhile the *Belle-Nivernaise*, feeling the full force of the current, shot with the velocity of an arrow toward the Austerlitz bridge. Bending tranquilly over the tiller, Victor steered, comforted the children, and gave orders to the Crew.



He was sure of his course, for he was steering by the red flag hung in the centre arch to show the boatmen the channel. But would there be head-room enough? That was the question. The bridge rapidly drew nearer.

"Take the pole, Crew! Clara, don't leave the children."

He bent over the tiller. He felt already the wind of the arch in his hair. They were at the bridge.

Borne on by the stream, the *Belle-Nivernaise* disappeared with a horrible rushing sound under

the roadway, — not so quickly, however, but that the crowd massed along the parapet saw the sailor with the wooden leg make a pass with his pole at the

pier, miss it, and fall flat on his stomach, while the lad at the helm called, —

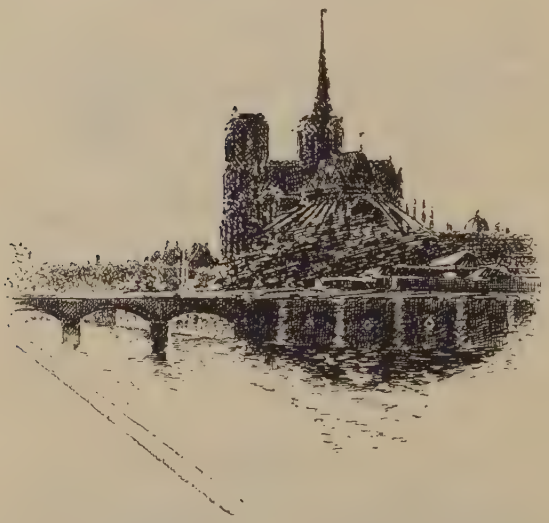
"A grapnel! A grapnel!"

The *Belle-Nivernaise* was under the bridge. In the obscurity Victor saw plainly the great rings fastened in the stones of the piers, the joints in the

crown of the arch over his head, and in perspective a series of bridges beyond framing in patches of sky.

The horizon broadened, the air freshened as they came out, there was a sound of cheering above, and he saw the cathedral anchored in the stream like a frigate. The boat came to a sudden stop. The bridge-tenders had succeeded in making a grapnel fast in the gunwales.

Victor ran to the capstan and caught the grapnel·



line to the hawser. The *Belle-Nivernaise* veered, swung about, and yielding to the pull of the cable brought slowly up at the Tournelle quay, with her helpless Crew, her infantile passengers, and her fifteen-year-old captain.

There were great rejoicings that night, you may be sure, as they rehearsed the events of the day over the savory stew in the cabin of the *Belle-Nivernaise*, now safely and quietly lying at her moorings.

The little hero had the place of honor, — the captain's place. They had good appetites after the

experiences of the morning. Their hearts were light as after release from pain, and they took long, deep breaths. They winked at each other across the table, as much as to say, —

"Just as well, eh, that we did n't take him back to the commissary?"

And Père Louveau laughed to the ears and cast a misty glance around his brood.

Any one would have said that they had met with some stroke of good fortune, that the *Belle-Nivernaise* had not a leak in her old sides, that they had drawn a prize in the lottery. The skipper pounded Victor on the back, — his method of displaying affection.

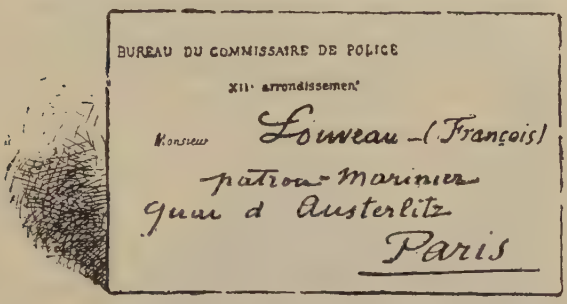
"It was a Victor morning! What a sweep of the tiller! Did you see it, Crew? Could n't have done better myself."

For two weeks the amiable François ran about the quays, uttering incoherent exclamations and telling about the way the lad handled the tiller.

"You understand — boat drifting broadside — then he — r-r-r-pt!" and then in gesture he would show how the thing was accomplished.

Meanwhile the Seine sank towards its normal level, and the time for departure drew near. One morning as Victor and Louveau were working at the

pump, the postman came with a letter. It had a blue seal on the back. The skipper opened the document with a trembling hand, and as he was


BUREAU DU COMMISSAIRE DE POLICE

XIIe arrondissement

Monsieur Louveau (François)

patron-Marinier

Quai d Austerlitz

Paris

not much better at reading than at arithmetic he said to Victor, "Spell it out, lad." And Victor read: —

"Office of the Commissary of Police,
"xiith Arrondissement.

"Mr. Louveau (François), master-mariner, is requested to apply at the Office of the Commissary of Police, with the least possible delay."

"That all?"

"That 's all."

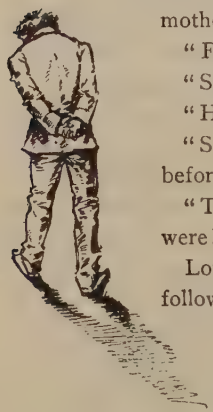
Louveau was gone all day. When he returned at night his good spirits had vanished. He was gloomy, irritable, and reserved. Mère Louveau did n't understand it, and as the children had gone out on deck to play, she asked, —

"What 's the matter?"

"I 'm tired."

"Anything about the business?"

"No, about Victor." Then he told of his visit to the commissary. "You know that woman that left him? Well, she wa'n't his mother."



"Fiddlesticks!"

"She stole him."

"How d' you know?"

"She confessed to the commissary before she died."

"Then she told who his parents were?"

Louveau trembled. "'Twould n't follow that they 'd tell me."

"What! — when they sent for you on purpose?"

François got angry. "When I know perhaps I 'll tell you!" He was flaming with wrath. He went out, slamming the door. Mère Louveau was dumbfounded.

"What on earth can be the matter with him? Something 's wrong with my François, sure."

From that day his character seemed to undergo a complete change. His habits, his manners, his ways of speech were altered. He ate little, slept ill, and talked in his sleep.

He contradicted his wife!

He quarrelled with the Crew, and was rough with everybody, particularly with Victor.

When Mère Louveau, in her astonishment, asked him what was the matter, he would brusquely reply, —

"Nothing's the matter. Do I act as if anything was the matter? You're all in a plot against me!"

The poor woman had her labor for her pains. "My faith!" she said, "I believe he's going crazy!"

In fact she came to the conclusion that he was wholly off his head one night, when he made a tremendous row over Maugendre.

They were nearing the end of the trip and almost at Clamecy. Victor and Clara talked of school, and the lad declared that he would be glad to see Maugendre again. Père Louveau interrupted, —

"Shut up with your Maugendre! I don't want anything more to do with him."

The mother interposed. "Why, what's he done to you?"

"He's — he's — That's none of your business. Who's master here, anyhow?"

Alas, he was so much the master that instead of landing at Corbigny, according to his custom, he went six miles further up into the heart of the forest. He declared that all Maugendre cared about

was to drive sharp bargains, and he could do better with another agent.

The children were too far from the village to think of going to school. Victor and Clara ran about the woods all day, gathering fagots. When they were tired they would throw their burdens down in some cosey spot and rest on the flower-strewn earth, Victor taking a book from his pocket and reading to Clara.

They liked to watch the sunbeams filtering through the branches and casting tremulous dashes of light over the printed page and over each other's hair. Above them was the hum of myriads of small creatures, around them the peacefulness of the forest.

When they had lingered late they had to hasten along the broad avenue guarded by the trunks

of the sombre trees. In the distance they could see the illuminated mass of the *Belle-Nivernaise* and the gleam of the fire on the mist that rose lightly from the river.

Mère Louveau would be cooking in the open air by the side of the stream over a blaze of brushwood.

Near her, Mimile, with shaggy hair, and blouse

bagging above his breeches, watched the kettle with solicitous eye. The baby would be rolling on the ground. Louveau and the Crew would be smoking their pipes.

One night, at the supper hour, they saw some one emerge from the woods and come towards them.

"Why, there 's Maugendre!"

It was the carpenter, older, grayer, a stick in his hand, and evidently troubled in breathing. He went up to Louveau and stretched out his hand.

"So you 've thrown me over, François?"

The skipper stammered an embarrassed reply. "Oh, no, — not so bad as that."

The carpenter looked so worn-out that Mère Louveau was touched. Paying no attention to her husband's ill temper, she offered the new-comer a seat.

"You 're not sick, I hope, Mr. Maugendre?"

"I 've taken a bad cold."

He spoke slowly and in a low tone. Adversity had softened him. He said that he was going to leave the country and make his home back in Nièvre.

"I 'm through with it; I sha'n't work any more.

I 'm rich now. I 've got lots of money. But what good does that do me? I can't buy back the happiness that I 've lost." François listened with knitted brow. Maugendre went on: "The older I get, the more I suffer from loneliness. Once I could forget myself in work, but now I have no heart for my task. I 've lost my zest for about everything. So I 'm going to make a change; perhaps that will afford me a little distraction."

As if in spite of himself his eyes wandered to the children At this moment Victor and Clara came from the forest with their load of waste wood. Seeing Maugendre they threw down their bundles and ran to his side. He received them in a friendly way, as was his custom, and said to Louveau, who was still sullen, —

"You ought to be happy with four children. I have none." He sighed. "Well, I ought not to complain. It 's my own fault." He arose from his seat. The others got up. "Good-by, Victor. Be a good boy and love your parents; you have reason to do so." He put his hand on the lad's

shoulder and looked long in his face. "If I had my boy, he'd be about your age."

Louveau stood looking on with a hard, contemptuous expression, which seemed to say,—

"Oh, give us a rest!"

However, as the carpenter was about to depart, François felt a touch of pity, and exclaimed, —

"Maugendre, stay and have supper with us."

It was said as if against his will, and in a rough tone that did not invite acceptance. The other bent his head.

"Thanks, I 'm not hungry. The happiness of others does not cheer when we are sad." He went away, leaning on his stick.

Louveau spoke not a word all that evening. He passed the night walking to and fro on the deck, and in the morning departed without saying anything to anybody.

He went to the house of the priest, who lived close by the church in a large, square building, with a yard in front and a vegetable garden in the rear.

Fowls pecked about the door, and a cow, tethered on the grass, was lowing.

Louveau already felt cheered by his purpose. Opening the gate, he said to himself, with a sigh of satisfaction, that he would be rid of his trouble when he came out.

He found the priest seated at the breakfast-table; having finished his repast, he was sleeping softly, his head bowed over his breviary. Awakened by

Louveau's entrance, he marked the page, and closing the book gave a seat to the skipper, who was twirling his hat in his hands.

"Well, François, what can I do for you?"

Louveau wanted advice, and he asked permission to relate all the circumstances.

"Because, you know, your reverence, I 'm not so very wise, — not an eagle, as my wife says, he, he!"

And somewhat at ease after the ice was broken, he proceeded to narrate the whole affair, very much out of breath, very red, and studiously regarding the brim of his hat.

"You remember, your reverence, that Maugendre told you he was a widower. That was fifteen years ago; his wife went up to Paris as nurse. She took her child to a doctor, as the custom is, gave him a last sup, and then turned him over to a tender."

"What 's a 'tender,' François?" interrupted the priest.

"A tender, your reverence, is a woman who takes babies back home when the mothers go out to nurse."

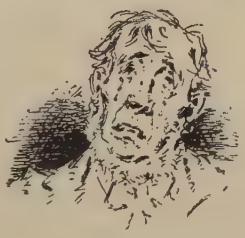
"Carry them back to the father in a basket, like kittens? It 's a droll trade."

"Some very good people do it, your reverence. But Maugendre's wife fell in with a wicked woman, a witch, who stole children and let them out to other lazy rascals to be dragged about the streets and excite charity."

"What sort of a story is this, François?"

"It's true, every word of it, your reverence. That beast of a woman carried off a lot of children,

Maugendre's kid among the number. She kept him till he was four years old. She tried to teach him to beg, but he was the son of an honest man, and he would n't hold out his hand for money. Then she left him in the street, to shift for himself. But six months afterwards, when she was dying at the hospital, she had a spasm of remorse. I know what that is, your reverence; it hurts like the old Scratch." He lifted his



glance to the ceiling as if to bear witness to the truth of this assertion, poor man.

"Well, she called for the commissary and told him the child's name, and the commissary told me. It was Victor."

The priest dropped his breviary. "Victor the son of Maugendre?"

"Sure."

The priest sank into a revery. He muttered a phrase of which one could catch the words, "poor child — hand of God." He got up, walked across the room, looked out the window, poured a glass of water, and finally paused, face to face with Louveau, his fingers thrust into his cincture. He tried to think of a sentence appropriate to the occasion, and failing this said simply, —

"Well, you must give him back to his father."

Louveau trembled. "That's just where the trouble comes, your reverence. I've known this thing for six months, and I haven't had the courage to tell anybody, not even my wife. We've taken so much pains to bring up that little chap, — we've

had so much hard times together, — that when it comes to the point, I don't see how I can give him up."

True enough, every word, and if Maugendre seemed to be entitled to sympathy, one could not help feeling pity for poor François.

Caught between these rival affections, the priest perspired freely and mentally besought Heaven for guidance. And then, forgetting that Louveau had

come to him for advice, he inquired in a muffled tone, —

"Now just suppose, François, that you were in my place. What would your advice be?"

The skipper bent his head. "I see plainly, your reverence, that I must give up Victor. I saw it the other day, when Maugendre surprised us with his visit. I felt bad to see him looking so old and sad and broken. I was as ashamed as if I 'd had money of his — money that I 'd stolen — in my pocket.

I could n't keep my secret any longer by myself, so I came to you."

"And you did well, Louveau," said the priest, delighted at the solution of the difficulty that the skipper had furnished. "It is never too late to repair a fault. I will go with you to Maugendre's; you will tell him all."

"To-morrow, your reverence."

"No, François. Now." And perceiving the sorrow of the poor fellow, the convulsive twirling of the hat, he implored in a feeble voice, —

"I beg of you, Louveau, since we have both reached the same conclusion!"

V

Maugendre's Hopes.

V

Maugendre's Hopes.

A son! Maugendre has a son! Seated opposite the lad in the railway carriage that bears them with a roar toward Nevers, the father covers his eyes with his hands.

It was a veritable abduction. The old man took his child away with hardly a word of thanks, like a churl who has won the prize at a raffle and made off with it.

He had no wish to leave his boy a moment longer under the strain of old friendships.

There are misers of affection, as there are misers of gold.

No more borrowing, no more lending, but his treasure to himself, with no peering eyes to witness his passionate greed.

Maugendre has a roaring in his ears, like the thunder of the express train, and his head is as hot as a locomotive. His dreams fly more rapidly than locomotives or express trains, traversing, at one sweep, days, months, years.

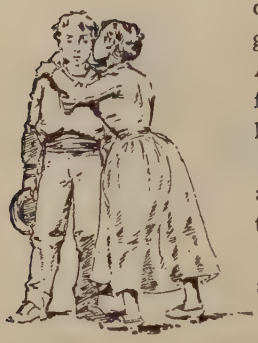
In his dream he sees Victor at twenty, clad in dark green, and silver buttoned, — a student in the Forestry School! One might fancy, too, that young Maugendre wears a sword at his side and a two-pointed hat over his ears, like a polytechnic, for the schools and the uniforms are a trifle mixed in the dreams of Maugendre senior.

Ah, well, no matter! Gold lace and such frippery are inexpensive trifles to the carpenter.

There's "stuff" enough to pay for all that. Victor shall be a "gentleman," tricked out from head to foot. Men will take off their hats to him, sweet women will be crazy after him. And standing one side will be an old man with calloused hands who will say proudly, —

"That 's my son. Well, son!"

"My son" also has his dreams, his little cap drawn down over his eyes in default of the gold-laced hat. He does n't want his father to see his tears. That separation was so sudden. Clara's kiss still burns upon his cheek. Père Louveau turned away. Mère Louveau was very pale. Mimile brought his soup spoon as an emblem of consolation. All, even Mimile. Oh, how would they get along with-



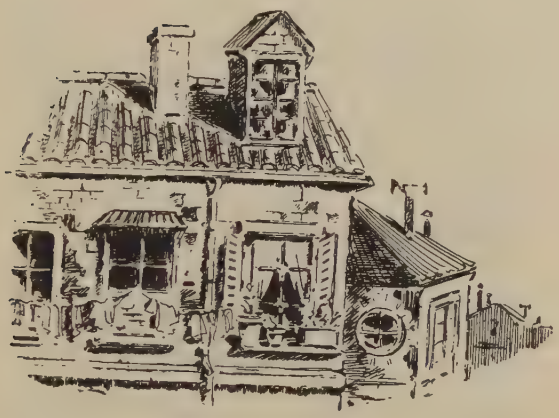
out him? How should he get along without them? And the future student of forestry is so confused that he keeps saying, —

"Yes, Mr. Maugendre," all the time his father is talking.

He is not by any means at the end of his tribulations, the little skipper of the *Belle-Nivernaise*. It not only costs money to be a "gentleman," but it also costs many trials and sorrows.

Victor has a presentiment of this as the express rolls with a shriek over the bridges above the suburbs of Nevers. It seems to him as if he had somewhere seen in a distant and mournful past the narrow streets, and the cramped windows, like the breathing holes of a prison, with their decorations of frayed rags.

Now the pavement is beneath their feet.



About them circles and buzzes the crowd of arriving passengers, while spectators throng closely, people with boxes hustle about, and as the cabs and the heavy railway omnibus roll up, travellers with strapped-up rugs take them furiously by assault.

Victor and his father seat themselves in a carriage and are whisked through the station gates. The carpenter does not lose sight of his idea for an instant. He insists on a transformation scene. He takes "my son" at once to the college tailor.

The shop is new, the counters glitter, and well-dressed attendants, bearing a resemblance to the figures in the colored fashion-plates on the wall, open the door to patrons with a conciliatory smile.

Under the eyes of Père Maugendre they spread out the choicest issues of the *Modes Illustrées* and show him a collegian smoking in company with a woman in riding-habit, a sportsman in hunting costume, and a bride clad in white satin.

Of course the tailor has in stock "the regular thing," embroidered front and back, with square skirts and gilt buttons. He dangles it before the gaze of the carpenter, who exclaims in radiant pride, —

"You 'll have quite the military look in that!"

A man in shirt-sleeves, with a tape measure around his neck, comes up to young Maugendre and takes the circumference of his chest and waist and the length of his spinal column.

This operation recalls to the little skipper memories that blur his eyes with tears. Père Louveau's ways, the sharp-tongued outbursts of Mère Louveau, — how they all come back to him!

However, the business in hand is soon over, and

the elegantly attired youth in military uniform whom Victor beholds reflected in the big show-mirror has not much in common with the boy-sailor of the *Belle-Nivernaise.*

The tailor disdainfully with the tip of his boot thrusts the discarded jacket under the counter, as if it were a bundle of rags.

Victor feels as if his entire past had been taken from him. "Taken"? Yes; they forbid him even to remember.

"You must break at once with the mistakes of your early training," says the principal, severely, not concealing his distrust; and to facilitate the process of regeneration it is decided that the new student

shall be permitted to have a holiday only on the first Sunday of every month.

Oh, how he cried that first night, lying in the cold and gloomy dormitory, while the other students

snored in their iron beds, and the sub-master devoured a novel on the sly by the light of a night-lamp.

How he suffered during the dreaded recess hours, when his school-fellows hustled him about and teased him.

How sad he was in study time, his nose in his book, trembling at the wrath of the master, who pounded with all his might on his desk and continually vociferated the same phrase, —

"A little more silence, gentlemen!"

That clamorous voice stirred all the latent memories within him and poisoned his life. It recalled the dark days of his early infancy, the squalid tenements of the Temple quarter, the blows, the angry words, — all that he had forgotten.

And he clutched despairingly at the images of Clara and the *Belle-Nivernaise*, as so many sunbeams in the darkness of his unhappy existence.

That, no doubt, is why the stupefied master was

always finding pictures of boats on the pages of Maugendre's text-books, — always the same boat, reproduced in every detail with zealous obstinacy.

Sometimes this persistent craft ascended slowly the canal-like limits of the narrow margins; sometimes she sailed heedlessly straight through a theorem, obscuring the diagrams and blotting out

important portions of the corollaries in fine type; sometimes she graced the maps, where she monopolized the ocean, all sails set and colors flying.

The principal, worn out with frequent reports of

these delinquencies, finally spoke to Maugendre senior about the matter. The carpenter could n't get over his surprise at such actions.

"Such a gentle lad!"
"He 's as obstinate as a donkey."
"So bright and quick!"
"We can't teach him anything."

And no one could understand why young Maugendre, back in the woods, learned to read so easily over Clara's shoulder, and was not able to

acquire the elements of geometry under the ruler of a whiskered master. Consequently, they dropped him down from the "middlers" to the "littles."

Now, the truth is that there was a marked difference between the instruction dealt out by the

teacher at Corbigny and the instructors in the Nivers College. It was a difference as great as that between a rabbit-skin cap and an ermine head-covering.

Old Maugendre was in despair. He seemed to see the forestry pupil in two-pointed hat running away as fast as his legs would carry him. He scolded, he supplicated, he adjured.

"Do you want private lessons? Do you want tutors? I 'll get 'em for you, — the best, and the most expensive!"

Meanwhile young Maugendre became a dunce. The quarterly reports recorded pitilessly his shameful lack of progress.

He is himself conscious of his stupidity. Every day he sinks deeper into the depths of indifference

and melancholy. If only Clara and the others could see the fate that had befallen their poor Victor, how quickly they would hasten to open wide the doors of his prison-house! With what hearty goodwill would they offer to divide with him their last crust, and to share with him their last corner of shelter!

For things are not going well with the Louveaus, either. Business turns from bad to worse, and the boat gets more and more rickety.

Victor knows this through Clara's letters, which reach him from time to time, marked "Passed" in big, red, furious, scrawly characters by the principal, who detests this "interloping correspondence."

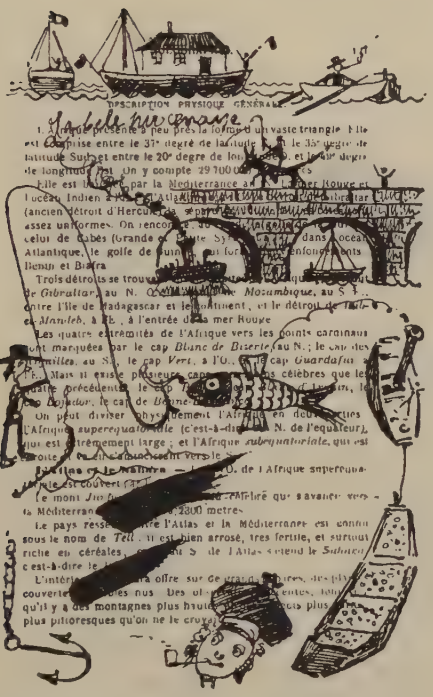
"Ah, if you were only here," Clara's tender and increasingly solicitous letters kept saying, — "Ah, if you were only here, with us!"

Were they not right in declaring that all would be well in those trying times, and that all would yet be saved if Victor would come back?

Very good. Victor will pluck success from failure. He will buy a new boat. He will console Clara. He will reclaim the business. He will let them see that they have not cherished an ingrate and cared for a useless fellow.

But to accomplish all that, one must be a man; one must earn money, one must know a lot, — and Victor opened his books at a fresh page.

Now the spit-balls may fly, the master may pound on his desk and rehearse his parrot-like phrase, —



"A little more silence, gentlemen!"

Victor never lifts his nose. He draws no more boats. He scorns the spit-balls that flatten against his face. He digs and digs.

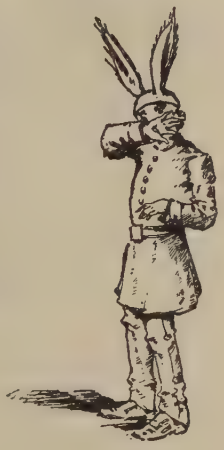
"Letter for young Maugendre."

- 30 -
THEORÈME
118 Les diagonales d'un losange se coupent à angles droits.
Fig. 63.
LIVRE DEUXIEME
DE LA CIRCONFÉRENCE ET DU CERCLE
120. Circonférence. La circonférence est une ligne courbe
121. Cercle. Le cercle est la surface renfermée par la circonférence. Telle est la surface limitée par la circonférence ABC.
122. Rayon On appelle rayon toute droite qui va du centre à la circonférence. OA, OB sont des rayons
Fig. 63.
Le naufrage de la belle Nivernaise par Victor Mangeot

This message from Clara comes like a benediction in the midst of his tasks, as if to encourage him in

his determination and solace him with the perfume of liberty and affection.

Victor bends his head to kiss the superscription, written in a zig-zag, faint, and trembling hand.



The boat must have been rolling heavily when the address was written. Alas, it was no rolling boat, but emotion, that had agitated Clara's pen.

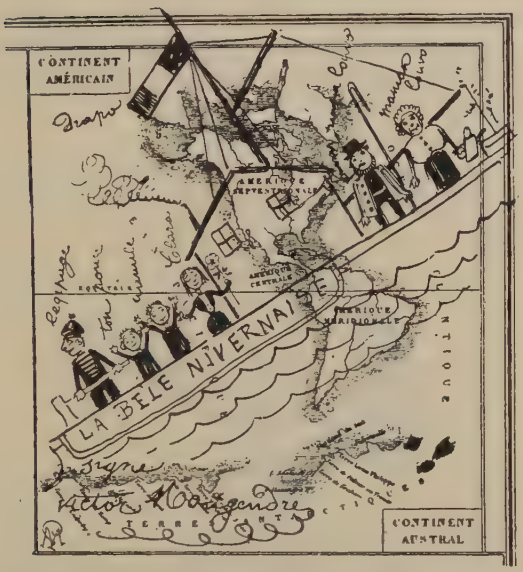
"It's all over, my dear Victor. The *Belle-Nivernaise* will sail no more. She is done for, and we are ruined. They have hung up a black sign on her:—

"'*To be Demolished.*
"'WOOD FOR SALE.'

"People have come and made estimates and taken an inventory of everything, from the Crew's landing-pole to the baby's cradle. They are going to sell everything, and we shall have nothing left. What are we to do? Mother is dying with grief, and father is so changed —"

Victor could not finish the letter. The words danced before his eyes; he was stupefied, and there was a roaring in his ears.

He was far from being the model student now. Worn out by confinement, grief and fever, he



became delirious. He was drifting down the Seine. The broad, rolling stream carried him onward. He wanted to bathe his forehead in the cool water. He seemed to hear the sound of a bell. Probably it was a tug-boat going by in the fog. Then the sound was like the sound of many waters, and he called aloud, —

"The flood! The flood!"

A trembling seized upon him as he thought of the

darkness beneath the arch of the bridge. In the midst of these visions the hairy, frightened face of the master appears close to him under the lamp-shade.

"Are you ill, Maugendre?"

Yes, Maugendre is very ill. The doctor shakes his head doubtfully when the poor father, who has

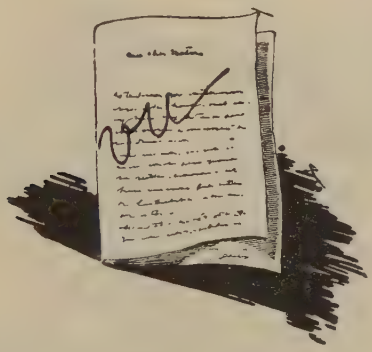
accompanied him to the college door, asks in a tone of stifled anguish,—

"He is n't going to die?"

It is easy to see that the doctor has no encouragement to offer. His gray hairs give solemnity to his

opinion. He says "No," but softly, as if he feared to commit himself.

There is no more talk about the dark-green coat and the two-pointed hat. It is now simply a ques-

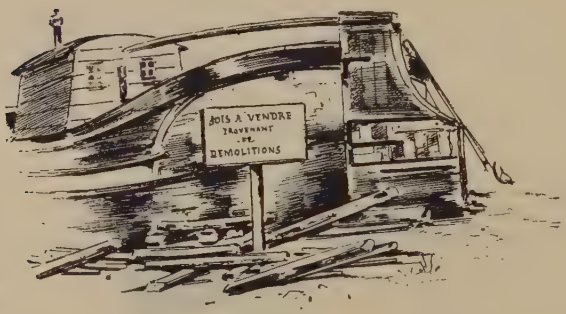


tion of preventing young Maugendre from taking it upon himself to die. The doctor has said distinctly that if the lad recovers it will be advisable to give him a long holiday.

If he recovers! The thought of losing his child whom he has just found puts an end to all the ambitious projects of the anxious father. It is all over; he renounces his dream. He is ready to give up the forestry student and he promises himself not to mourn after his vanished ideal; but the other — the real boy — must live. Oh, if he would only

speak, rise up, throw his arms around the father's neck, and say, —

"Don't worry, father. I 'm going to get well."



The carpenter bows himself upon Victor's bed. It is over. The old tree is split to the core. Maugendre's heart has softened at last.

"I 'll let you go, lad. You shall go back to them and be a sailor again. I 'll be content just to see you as you go by."

The bell no longer gives the signal for recess, meals, and study. It is vacation time and the great college is practically deserted. No noise is heard, save that of the water plashing in the fountain in the court-yard and the sparrows squabbling on the play-ground. The rumble of infrequent carriages

comes deadened from a distance, for they have spread straw in the street.

In the midst of such silence and solitude, little Maugendre awakes. He is surprised to find himself in a white bed surrounded by great muslin

curtains which isolate him completely in a seclusion of twilight and peace. He would like to lift his head and push the curtains apart a little, to see where he is, but although he feels nicely rested, he has n't much strength, so he waits.

Voices whisper about him. There is a sound of steps, going a-tiptoe on the bare floor, and a familiar

clumping, like the regular fall of a broomstick. Victor has heard something like that somewhere. Where? Why, on the deck of the *Belle-Nivernaise*.

That 's it! Of course, that 's it! And gathering all his strength the invalid calls out in a voice which he believes to be very loud, but which is in reality very weak: —

"Avast there, Crew! Bear a hand!"

The curtains part, and in a dazzle of light he beholds all the dear ones upon whom he has been calling in his delirium.

All? Yes, all! They are all there, — Clara, Maugendre, Père Louveau, Mère Louveau, Mimile, the little sister, and old wistful Long-Legs, lean as his landing-pole, laughing his inexhaustible silent laugh.

Arms are stretched out, heads bend down, and there are kisses from every one, and smiles, and claspings of the hand, and questions.

"Where am I? What are you doing here?"

But the doctor's orders are positive. His dignified gray hairs will permit no violation of rules. Arms must be put back under the coverlid, the patient must be quiet and not excite himself. So, to keep the child from talking, Maugendre senior talks all the time.

"Well, you see, ten days ago, — the day when you fell ill, — I had just been to see the principal

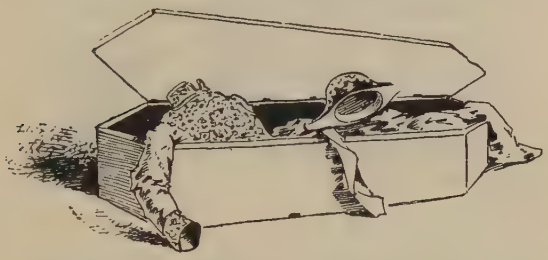
and had a talk with him about you. He told me that you were getting on, and that you were working like a good one. You can imagine how pleased I was. I asked to see you. They sent out to let you know, and just then the sub-master rushed into the office in a scare. You had been taken down with an attack of fever. I hastened to the sick-ward. You did n't

recognize me. Your eyes burned like candles and you were raving. Ah, poor little chap, how sick you have been! I did n't leave you for a minute.

"You scoured the country, talked of the *Belle-Nivernaise*, Clara, a new boat, a lot of things. Then I remembered the letter, — Clara's letter; they had found it in your hands and given it to me. And I had forgotten it — you understand. I took it from my pocket, read it, scratched my head, and said, —

"'Maugendre, you must n't let your grief make you forget the misery of your friends.'"

"I wrote to the Louveaus to come and stay with us. No reply. One day, when you seemed better,

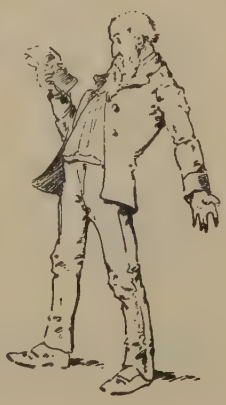


I went in search of them. I brought them back with me, and they've been staying where I stay; and they'll go on staying there till we can fix up some other arrangement. That's so, ain't it, Louveau?"

There are tears in every eye, and in spite of the doctor's gray hairs Victor's two arms emerge from the coverlet, and Maugendre is hugged as he has never been before, and given a kiss of true filial affection.

Then, as Victor cannot yet be taken to the house, they arrange matters. Clara is to remain to look

after the gruel and keep the invalid "entertained." Mère Louveau is to act as housekeeper. François will superintend a building which the carpenter has undertaken on the Grand-Rue.



As for Maugendre, he goes back to Clamecy, to interview some acquaintances who have large timber interests and who will be delighted to employ a trusty boatman like Louveau. No, no! There must n't be any objections or refusals. The affair is all arranged and is quite simple.

Victor, certainly, makes no objections. He can sit up now, and his big chair is

rolled close to the window. He is alone in the sick-ward with Clara, and he is perfectly happy. He blesses his illness, he blesses the sale of the *Belle-*

Nivernaise, he blesses all the illnesses and all the sales in the world.

"Do you remember, Clara, when I used to be steering, how you would come and sit by me with your knitting?"

Clara remembers so

distinctly that she looks down and blushes, and an embarrassed silence falls between them.

For Victor is no longer the little skipper in the red wool cap, whose feet do not touch the deck as he throws himself astride of the tiller.

And Clara, when she came in that morning and took off her shawl and threw it on the bed, seemed suddenly to have grown up into a young lady, with plump, round arms, and a straight, tall figure.

"Come early, Clara, and stay as late as you can."

It is nice to breakfast and dine together, close by the window and shaded by the white curtains. It

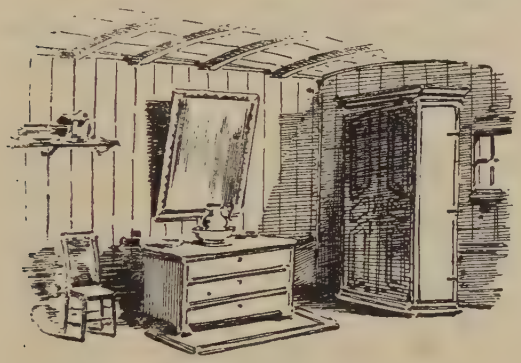
reminds them of their infancy and of the soup they devoured, sitting on the edge of the bed, and from the same spoon. Ah, memories of childhood!

While they sit there together in the college infirmary, their fancies dart hither and thither, like birds on the wing, and every moment their airy thoughts find a new lighting-place, for each day brings new subjects for discussion and contemplation.

Really, to overhear these two at conversation, you would take them to be a pair of octogenarians. Nothing seems to have any interest for them but the past.

Is there no future that may perhaps be worthy

of consideration? Yes, there is a future, and they think of it very often, but their thoughts never translate themselves into words.



Moreover, it is not an impossible thing to carry on a conversation without words. There are certain ways of taking a hand or of blushing, that to the initiated convey a great deal of information.

Victor and Clara converse in that sort of language all day long. That is probably why they are so often silent; and that, no doubt, is why the days pass so quickly and a whole month has run by before they realize that it has come.

So the doctor rumples up his gray hair and turns his patient out of the infirmary, and curiously enough, Maugendre the elder returns just at that

moment from his journey. He finds everybody together at the house, and when poor Louveau asks uneasily, —

"Well, does any one want me, down there?" —

Maugendre bursts out laughing. "Any one want you, old boy? They want a skipper for a new boat,

and they thanked me for letting them know of just the man for the place."

Who are "they"? Père Louveau is so delighted that he does n't take the trouble to inquire. And they all set out for Clamecy, equally indifferent.

How glad they were to see the canal again! There, made fast to the wharf, is a magnificent,

brand-new boat, with flags flying all over her, and her varnished mast shining against the foliage.

She is getting the finishing touches, and the stern where the name ought to be is covered with a piece of old canvas. A cry goes up from every mouth, —

"Ah, what a fine boat!"

Louveau can scarcely believe his eyes. His excitement makes his eyelids twitch, holds him dumb, and sets his ear-rings shaking. At last he says, —

"She's too fine for me. I should n't dare sail a craft like that. She is n't made for use. She ought to be put under a glass case."

Maugendre had to push him on board, where the Crew was violently gesticulating.

What! — the Crew back? Yes, back, furnished up, rigging in order, and as good as new. His boat-hook and leg show no signs of wear. All this is a

pleasant little tribute from the owner, who, it seems, has got things up in great shape.

Why, see here! The deck is polished hard wood, with a fancy rail around. There 's a bench to sit on, and an awning for shelter. The hold is deep enough to take a double cargo. And the cabin! — my gracious, just look into the cabin!

"Three rooms!"

"A cook's galley!"

"Looking-glasses!"

Louveau drags Maugendre out on deck. He is very much wrought up and trembles with emotion, even to his ear-rings.

"My good Maugendre — " he stammers.

"Say on."

"There 's only one thing more I want to know."

"Well?"

"And that is, who I 'm to sail this craft for."

"You want to know that?"

"Sure."

"Well, for yourself."

"What? — then the boat— "

"Is your own."

What a shock that was, like a blow planted straight in the chest. Fortunately, the builder,

whoever he was, had the happy thought of putting a seat out there on deck. Louveau sank upon it, completely overcome.

"It can't be. I can't accept— "

Maugendre has a reply quite equal to the occasion. "Tut, tut! You forget that old debt, — the

expenses you 've had on account of Victor. Be easy, François, the balance is on your side yet."

The two friends embrace like brothers. No one will think it silly if the fact is recorded that tears were shed.

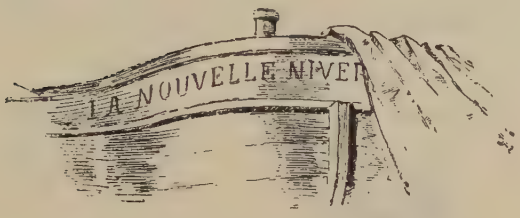
Certainly, Maugendre had planned everything so that the surprise should be complete, for while the two men embrace on deck, the priest comes from the woods, leading a procession with banner and music.

"Now what?"

"Christen the boat, by gad!"

All Clamecy has come to take part in the festival. The banner floats in the wind. The music pours out. Zim-boom-boom! And everybody is full of joy.

The beautiful sunshine glitters on the cross and on the brass instruments of the musicians. Such a lovely celebration!



They have removed the piece of old canvas that hid the stern. The name of the boat stands out in graceful letters of gold on a dark-blue ground, —

THE NEW NIVERNAISE.

Three cheers for the *New Nivernaise!* May she have a life as long as her predecessor, and a much more happy old age!

The priest draws near the boat. Behind him the choir and the band form into a single line. The banner brings up the rear.

"*Benedicat Deus* — "

Victor is godfather and Clara godmother. The priest guides them to the edge of the wharf, close to his side. They take each other by the hand, timid and trembling. They stumble through the phrases that the boys of the

choir softly chant while his reverence sprinkles the holy water over them.

"*Benedicat Deus* —"

How much they looked like a young couple at the altar! The bystanders all thought so, and perhaps

the same thoughts came to the young couple themselves, for they did not dare to meet each other's eyes, and grew more and more confused as the ceremony went on.

It's over now. The crowd vanishes and the *New Nivernaise* is blessed. But the musicians cannot be allowed to depart without receiving some sort of refreshments.

And while Louveau pours glasses for the musicians, Maugendre, with a wink at Mère Louveau,

takes godfather and godmother by the hand and says to the priest, —

"So much for the christening, your reverence; when are we to have the wedding?"

Victor and Clara turn as red as poppies. Mimile and little sister clap their hands

In the midst of this general emotion, Père Louveau, in a somewhat elevated condition of mind, puts his hand on his daughter's shoulder. The worthy skipper laughs till his ear-rings shake, and enjoying to the full the joke in advance, he says in a bantering tone, —

"Say, Clara, wha' d' zhou think? Had n't we better take Victor back to the com'sary?"

JARJAILLE'S VISIT TO THE GOOD GOD

A Provençal Legend, after Louis Roumieux.

JARJAILLE'S VISIT TO THE GOOD GOD

A Provençal Legend, after Louis Roumieux.

JARJAILLE, a porter of Saint-Rémy, permitted himself to die one fine morning, and here he is, tumbling around in eternity, — round, and round, and round! Eternity is a big place, dark as pitch, deeper than a well, and it spreads out so it makes you afraid.

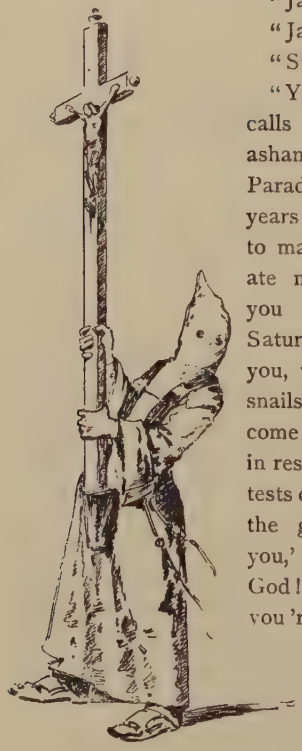
Jarjaille had n't the slightest idea which way to go. He wandered about in the gloom, his teeth chattering, and stretching out his arms like a blind man. By and by, away off yonder, he sees a little light, high up, very high up. He goes there. It 's the door to the good God's house.

Jarjaille knocks, — bang! bang!

"Who 's there?" cries St. Peter.

"Me!"

"Who?"



"Jarjaille."

"Jarjaille of Saint-Rémy?"

"Sure."

"You rascal," St. Peter calls back, "are n't you ashamed to try to get into Paradise, when for twenty years you have n't once been to mass? You, who always ate meat on Fridays when you could get it, and on Saturdays if you had it! — you, who called thunder the snails' drum, because snails come in a storm! — you, who in response to the saintly protests of your father, 'Jarjaille, the good God will punish you,' always said, 'The good God! Who 's he? When you 're dead, you 're dead!' — you, in fact, the champion atheist and blasphemer, — can it be that you have the cheek to present yourself here?"

"I don't deny what you say," responds Jarjaille. "I 'm a sinner, a poor, miserable sinner. But who

ever imagined that after one was dead there would be so many mysteries? However, I made a mistake; the wine 's uncorked and I must turn to and drink it. But, noble St. Peter, grant me permission to see my uncle a few minutes that I may tell him what has been going on in Saint-Rémy."

"What uncle?"

"My uncle Matéri, who was a White Penitent."

"Your uncle Matéri? He 's in Purgatory for a hundred years."

"A hundred years! What 's that for?"

"You remember, he used to carry the cross in the processions. One day two or three merry fellows got together and planned a little joke. The first stood close as he came along and said, 'Look at Matéri; he 's bearing the cross!' A little further on the second exclaimed, 'Look at Matéri; he 's bearing the cross!' Finally a third began, 'Look at Matéri; he 's bearing —' Matéri got angry at this, and replied: 'Is bearing? Well, if I was bearing you, I 'd be bearing a thundering big jackass!' With that he had a stroke, and perished in his wrath."

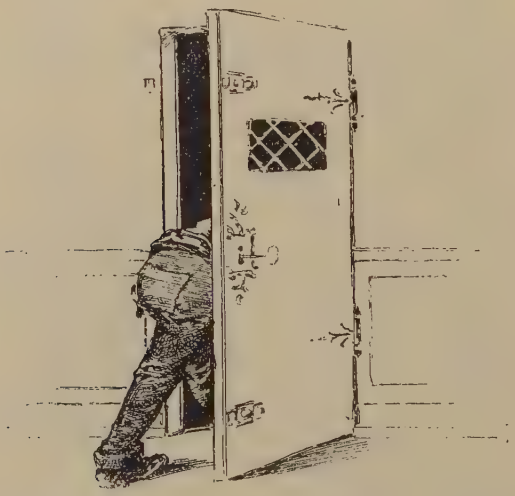
"Poor Matéri! Then let me see my aunt Dorothée, who was so — so pious."

"The Old Boy must have her. She never came here."

"Good enough! I 'm not a bit surprised. Why, let me tell you, with all her pious airs —"

"There, that will do, Jarjaille. I 'm busy, — I 've got to open the door for a poor crossing-sweeper whose donkey kicked him into Paradise."

"Oh, holy St. Peter, do me just one favor, then. It won't cost you anything. Let me have a little peep at Paradise. They say it 's fine!"



"Bah! Get out! Rather than let in a rascally heretic like you —"

"Just think, dear St. Peter! My father, a boatman on the Rhône, used to carry your banner in the processions."

"Well," said the saint, "so be it. For your father's sake, I grant the boon, but you know, my friend, it 's quite against the rules. You will simply have a chance to put the tip of your nose through the doorway, — just enough to give you a glimpse."

"Not an inch more."

Then the celestial door-keeper opened the door a crack and said: "There, look." But there was Jarjaille, faced the other way, coming back-first into Paradise!

"What are you doing?" demanded St. Peter.

"The light dazzles me," explained the visitor from Saint-Rémy; "I 'll have to back in. But don't be alarmed. According to your directions, when I get my nose inside I won't go any further."

"Well," thought the ever-blessed, "I 've put my foot in it, this time. The scamp has got into Paradise."

"My," said Jarjaille, "you 're pretty well fixed here! Ain't this fine! The music 's great!"

"When you have looked enough," the saintly door-keeper observed, after a moment, "I shall be glad to have you go out. I can't stand here all day."

"Don't worry yourself about that," responded Jarjaille; "if you 've got anything special to do, I won't detain you. I 'll go out — when I go out. There 's no hurry."

"Now, see here, — that was n't the agreement."

"Great heavens, my dear man, you 're making a good deal of fuss! If you were cramped for room here it would be different, but thanks be to God, it is n't room you lack."

"Now, just look here; you get out. If the good God should come along — "

"Huh, you 'll have to explain things the best you can. I 've always heard it said that when you get

a good thing, you 'd better hold on to it. I 'm here, and I 'm going to stay."

St. Peter shook his head and stamped his foot. Then he went to find St. Yves.

"Yves," he exclaimed, "you 're a lawyer; I want you to give me some advice."

"Certainly," replied St. Yves; "all you want."

"You see, I 've got into a mess." He put the case. "Now, what had I better do?"

"The thing to do," said St. Yves, "is to retain counsel and have the said Jarjaille summoned before the Court."

St. Peter hunted everywhere for an attorney, but could n't find one; such a person had never been seen in Paradise. Then he tried to find a sheriff — no sheriff, either.

St. Peter was badly stumped. About this time St. Luke passed by.

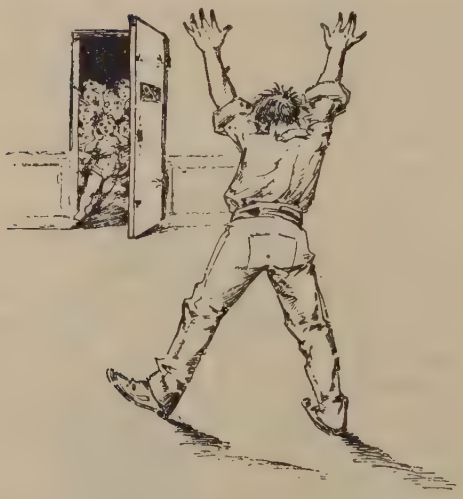
"What 's the matter, Peter? You look tremendously down in the mouth. What 's gone wrong?"

"Everything 's gone wrong. A fellow called Jarjaille has sneaked into Paradise, and I don't know how to get him out again."

"Where 's he from?"

"Saint-Rémy."

"Saint-Rémy!" exclaimed St. Luke; "why, you are n't sharp one little bit. You can get him out for nothing. See here; I am, as you know, the



protector of cattle and the patron of drovers. My business takes me all through Camargue, Arles, Nîmes, Beaucaire, and Tarascon; so I understand the people and know just how to take them. Why, those people will go through fire to see a bull-fight. Keep still a minute. I 'll get rid of your Jarjaille."

A flock of chubby little angels were sailing by. "My dears!" called St. Luke. "Chook, chook, chook!" The angels drew near.

"Go softly outside of Paradise, and when you 're in front of the door, run as fast as you can and call

out as they do at the Saint-Rémy bull-fights: 'The bulls! The bulls! Oh, hey! oh, hey! The pikes! The pikes!'"

And that is exactly what the angels did. They went outside Paradise, and when they got in front

of the door they made a rush for it, and called: "The bulls! Oh, hey! oh, hey!"

Jarjaille, hearing the cry, was stupefied with amazement. "By all that's great! — Here? — Bull-fights? — Gh-h-h-h!"

He rushed for the door like a maniac, and, poor devil, was in a second outside of Paradise!

St. Peter slammed the door, turned the key, and stuck his head through the loop-hole.

"Well, Jarjaille," he called with a laugh; "how does this suit you?"

"Oh, that's all right," replied Jarjaille. "If it 'd really been a bull-fight, I 'd 'a' swapped Paradise for it any day!" And with these words he plunged head first into eternity.

THE FIG AND THE SLUGGARD

An Algerian Legend.

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In the indolent and pleasure-loving town of Blidah, some years before the French invasion, lived a worthy Moor, by name Sidi Lakdar, and by his fellow-citizens nicknamed, "The Sluggard."

Now you must know that the Algerian Moors are the laziest people on earth, and the residents of Blidah especially so, probably on account of the perfume of orange and lemon blossoms, with which the place fairly reeks. But in laziness and listlessness, not one among all the Blidians could hold a candle to Sidi Lakdar. This worthy man had elevated his pet vice to the dignity of a profession. Others were embroiderers, coffee-house keepers, spice merchants; Sidi Lakdar was a sluggard.

At the death of his father, he had inherited a little garden on the outskirts of the town. The low,

white walls were tumbling to ruin, the vine-covered gate could not be closed, and a few fig-trees and bananas grew amid the spring-moistened herbage. There he was wont to pass his days, stretched out

at full length, silent, motionless, with red ants running through his beard. When he was hungry, he stretched out one hand and picked up a fig or a banana from the ground near by. If it had been necessary to get up and pick fruit from where it grew, he would have died of hunger. So in his little garden the figs ripened and rotted and the birds got a good share of them.

This actually unbridled laziness made Lakdar very popular all through the country. He received the homage due to a saint. When the women of the town, on their way to eat sweetmeats in the cemetery, passed by the little enclosure, they pulled up their mules to a slower pace and talked in muffled tones behind their white masks. The men made pious obeisance, and every day, when school was over, the garden walls swarmed with boys, in striped silk blouses and red caps, who tried their best to disturb the sluggard's repose. They called Lakdar by name, jeered, played tricks on him, pelted him

with orange skins, — all for nought. The sluggard never budged. Once in a while he would call from his bed in the grass: "Look out now! I 'm going to get up!" But he never got up.

Well, it so happened that on a certain day one of these brats, coming to get some fun out of the slug-

gard, was as it were touched with grace, and conceived a passion for a similar existence. He announced to his father that he should not go to school any more, and that he was going to be a sluggard.

"Sluggard? You?" said the father, an industrious turner of pipe-stems, as busy as a bee, and who was always seated before his wheel at cock-crow. "Sluggard? You? That is an idea!"

"Yes, father; I want to be a sluggard, like Sidi Lakdar."

"Not much, my lad. You 'll be a turner, like your father, or a scribe at the Kadi 's court, but a sluggard, never. Get along to school, or I 'll dress you down with this choice new strip of wild-cherry. Clear out, you blockhead!"

Yielding to the argument of the wild-cherry stick, the lad did not insist, but feigned obedience. Instead of going to school, however, he made his way to a Moorish bazaar, crept from the sight of a merchant between two piles of Smyrna rugs, and stayed there all day, lying on his back, watching the Moorish lanterns, the blue cloth bags, and the gold-embroidered vestments which sparkled in the sun, and inhaling the insinuating perfume of attar of rose and of the warm woollen burnooses. Thus did he pass the time that he should have spent at school.

A few days went by and the news of this thing came to the ears of the boy's father, who vainly scolded, stormed, blasphemed the name of Allah, and polished off his son's anatomy with all the wild-cherry sticks in the shop, — all to no purpose. The lad simply said: "I 'm going to be a sluggard; I 'm going to be a sluggard," — and then went to some snug corner and sought repose.

Discipline was suspended, and after consulting

with the scribe, Ali, the father decided what course to pursue.

"See here," he said to his son; "if you really want to be a first-class sluggard, I 'm going to take you to Lakdar. He shall put you through an ex-

amination, and if he finds that you have genuine talent for the trade, I 'll get him to take you as apprentice."

"That suits me," replied the boy.

And so, not later than the next day, freshly scented with vervain, and with heads newly shaved, they went in search of the sluggard in his little garden.

The gate was open as always. The two entered without knocking, and as the vegetation grew thick and high they had some difficulty in discovering

the master of the enclosure. Finally, however, they came upon him as he lay beneath the fig-trees, surrounded by a multitude of birds and a welter of weeds, — a bundle of yellow rags which received them with a grunt.

"Allah be with you, Sidi Lakdar," said the father, bowing low and placing his hand upon his breast. "Here is my son, who desires to be a sluggard. I 've brought him to you to be examined, that you may see if he has the right qualifications. If he has, I should like you to take him as apprentice. I 'll pay whatever is right."

Without speaking, Sidi Lakdar signed to them to sit down by him on the grass. The father sat down, the lad relaxed full length, — that of itself was a good beginning. They remained thus, in silence.

It was mid-day — very light and very warm. The little garden slept peacefully. Nothing was to be heard but the crackling of the flowering beans as their pods split open in the sun, the murmur of the water flowing through the herbage, and the over-fed birds as they fluttered among the foliage and opened or closed their wings. From time to time, a too ripe fig would break loose and tumble from branch to branch. Then Sidi Lakdar would put out his hand and with a weary air convey the fruit to his mouth. The lad, however, indulged in no such exertion. The finest figs fell about him, but he

never even lifted his head. The host, out of the corner of his eye, took note of this magnificent indolence, but said nothing.

An hour, two hours, passed thus. You can imagine that the poor pipe-stem turner began to find the visit rather tiresome; still, he did not dare to protest, so he sat there, motionless, eyes fixed, legs crossed, himself affected by the spirit of sloth which seemed to pervade the garden like the heat and the odor of half-baked bananas and oranges.

All at once a big fig fell from the tree and landed on the lad's cheek. A lovely fig, it was, bismillah! — rosy, nectarious, perfumed like a honey-comb. To bring it into his mouth, the lad had only to touch it with a finger, but such an exertion as that involved seemed to him altogether too fatiguing, so he lay there quietly with the fruit embalming his cheek. At last, however, the temptation was too strong; he glanced toward his father and said in a doleful voice, —

"Papa — papa; put it in my mouth."

At these words, Sidi Lakdar, who was holding a fig in his hand, threw it to a long distance, and exclaimed angrily to the father, —

"This is the child you ask me to take as apprentice? Why, he is master to me; I ought to take lessons of him!"

And falling on his knees, with forehead to the ground before the recumbent boy, he said, —

"I salute thee, O Father of the Lazy!"

MY FIRST DRESS-COAT

Recollections of Youth.

MY FIRST DRESS-COAT

(*Recollections of Youth.*)

How did I come to get that coat? What tailor of primitive lineage, what unhoped-for Sunday gentleman was it, who had faith enough in my fantastic promises and brought it to me one fine morning, artistically done up in a square of green cambric? I cannot possibly remember now. Of the honest tailor I have no recollection, — so many tailors have since then crossed my path of life! — at least all that remains of him through the luminous mist of the past is a pensive countenance adorned with huge moustaches. But the coat, ah, that is before me yet. After twenty years its image remains impressed upon my memory, like an etching upon a copper plate. What a collar, my youthful reader, and what lapels! And above all, what a skirt, cut like the mouth-piece of a flute! It possessed at once the troubadour graces of the Restoration and

the Spartan severity of the first Empire. It seemed to me, when I got it on my back, that I lapsed back half a century and had clothed myself in the doctrinaire habiliments of the illustrious Benjamin Constant. My brother, a man of experience, had said: "You must have a coat that will help you on in the world!" And the dear fellow counted much upon that garment for my future fame.

This coat I wore first at Augustine Brohan's, and these are the circumstances, — which are worthy of being passed on to posterity.

My first book had just bloomed forth in its fresh and virginal covering of rose. Several journals had spoken of my rhymes; the *Officiel* had even printed my name. I was no longer a poet in manuscript, but published, launched forth, and displayed upon the book-stalls. I was surprised to find that the crowd did not turn and look after me as I wandered in the pride of eighteen years through the streets. I already felt upon my brow the pressure of that gentle crown made up of favorable criticisms cut from the newspapers.

One day some one proposed to me that I should take in Augustine's reception. Some one? Who?

Well, some one! You have seen him; the eternal some one who is like everybody else, — that amiable and providential being who is nothing in himself, who is never well known, but who goes everywhere and takes you everywhere, — the friend of a day or an hour, whose name even is almost unknown to you, — an essentially Parisian type.

Did I accept? Well, rather! It was an invitation to visit Augustine, — Augustine, the famous comedy actress, Augustine, who was like a white-toothed laugh of Molière, with something of the more modern poetic smile of Musset, for, although she played soubrette at the Théâtre-Français, Musset had written for her his comedy of "Louison," — Augustine Brohan, in fact, whose wit Paris applauded, whose fine sayings were everywhere quoted, and who already wore on her hat — as yet unstained with ink, but all ready to be cut into a facile pen — the fashionable blue feather of the time, with which she was later on to sign "Susan's Letters."

"Well done!" said my brother, getting me into the new coat; "now your fortune is made."

Nine o'clock struck; I started. Augustine Brohan lived then in the Rue Lord-Byron, at the top of the Champs Élysées, in one of those coquettish little houses which in the poetic imagination of a poor devil from the provinces seemed like a dream of

romance. There was an iron gate, a little garden, a flight of four steps under an awning, an antechamber filled with flowers, and then the drawing-

room, — a green drawing-room, brilliantly lighted, — how well I see it now!

How I got up the steps, how I made my way inside, in what manner I was presented, I know not. An attendant announced my name, but that name, stuttered out at a distance, had no effect whatever upon the assembly. I remember only a woman's voice which said, —

"Is n't that good? — a dancer!" It seemed that they wanted one more. What an entry that was for a lyric poet!

Alarmed and humiliated, I lost myself in the crowd. But other trials awaited me. In a few minutes I had another adventure. My unfamiliar coat, my long hair, and my brooding and sombre glance aroused public curiosity. I heard whispers around about me. "Who 's that? Look at him!" and they laughed. Finally some one said, "It 's the Prince of Wallachia." "The Prince of Wallachia? Ah, yes, very good." It seemed that on this particular night they expected the Prince of Wallachia. I was classified, and they left me alone. But it was all the same to me, for you may well believe that during all that evening my new character was not an easy part. First a dancer, then the Prince of Wallachia. Could not those people see that I carried Apollo's lyre?

At last the quadrilles began. I danced, for I had to, but I danced badly enough, even for a Prince of Wallachia. The quadrille over, I stood helpless, stupidly hampered by my near-sightedness, — for I was not bold enough to sport an eye-glass, and was too much a poet to wear spectacles, — and I was in mortal terror every moment of striking my knee against a corner of a piece of furniture or stumbling over a woman's train. Hunger and thirst came upon me, but not for an empire would I have dared to enter the refreshment room when the others were there. I waited for the moment when it should be

empty. While waiting, I skirted about the groups of politicians, preserving a solemn air, and feigning to scorn the felicities of the little salon, whence came, with the noise of laughter and the ring of spoon upon porcelain, the subtle odor of smoking tea, of Spanish wines, and of cakes.

Finally, when they came back to dance again, I came to a decision. Behold me, then, entered there, and alone. It was a marvel, that refreshment room, glittering in the light of the candles, with its glasses,

its bottles, its pyramid of crystal, white, dazzling, as fresh to view as new-fallen snow in the light of the sun. I seized a glass; it was as frail as a flower. I was careful not to grasp it too closely for fear of breaking the stem. What should I pour into it?

Come, be brave, since no one is looking on. I grabbed a bottle gropingly, at haphazard. That must be Kirschwasser, it looks so clear and limpid. Well, then, here goes for a little glass of Kirsch; I love its perfume, that wild and untamed odor, which makes me dream of the great woods. I pour the clear liquor drop by drop into the glass, like an epicure. I lift the glass and bring it to my lips. Horrors, — pure water! I make up a face. A double outburst of laughter echoes about me. A black coat and a rose-colored gown had been flirting unperceived by me in a corner, and my mistake amused them. I set out to put the glass back, but I was agitated, my hand trembled, my sleeve hit against something or other. A glass fell, two glasses, three glasses. I turned, my coat-tails caught in the furnishings, and the white pyramid rolled to the floor with the scintillations, the thundering crash, and the protracted detonations of a collapsing iceberg.

The mistress of the house was attracted by this portentous racket. Fortunately, she was as near-sighted as the Prince of Wallachia, and the latter was able to get out of the refreshment room without being caught. It made no difference, my evening was spoiled. That massacre of little glasses and decanters weighed upon me with the magnitude of a crime. I only thought now of getting away.

But Mamma Dubois, fascinated by my principality, came up to me and declared that I must not go until I had danced with her daughter, — yes, with both her daughters. I excused myself with a very

ill grace, escaped, and was about to go out when a tall old man, with a shrewd smile, the head of a bishop, and the bearing of a diplomat, arrested me in my course. It was Dr. Ricord, with whom I had exchanged some words shortly before, and who, like the others, thought me to be Wallachia.

"But, Prince, since you are stopping at the Hôtel du Sénat, and we are almost neighbors, wait for me. There 's a place for you in my carriage."

I should have been glad to go with him, but I was without a top-coat. What would Ricord say of a Prince of Wallachia, deprived of furs and

shivering in his dress-coat? It were better to get away quickly, return on foot through the snow and fog, rather than to make a show of poverty. Near-sightedly, and more perturbed than ever, I gained the door and glided through, not without tangling myself up in the draperies.

"The gentleman is not taking his top-coat?" cried a lackey after me.

There I was, at two o'clock in the morning, far

from home, turned loose in the streets, famished, half frozen, and with little enough coin in my pocket. Suddenly hunger inspired me, and I had a

revelation. "Suppose I go to the markets?" I had often heard of the markets, and of a certain G ——, who kept open all night and who dealt out soups and succulent eatables for three sous. Deuce take it, yes, I will go to the market. I sought out a place there, like a tramp, a night rover. My pride had vanished. The wind had chilled me, and my stomach was empty. "My kingdom for a horse," said Richard; and I, as I hastened along, vociferated: "My principality, my Wallachian principality, for a plate of good soup in some warm corner!"

It was a dirty-looking place, this restaurant of G ——'s, snuggled in, slimy and ill lighted, under the pillars of the old market. Often, since then, when nocturnal outings were all the fashion, have I passed whole nights there, among embryo great men, elbows on the table, smoking and talking literature. But that first time, I confess, I felt, in spite of my hunger, like drawing back from the blackened walls and the people seated at the table, lolling backward or lapping their soup like so many dogs, — revolted at the filthy head-coverings of these Don Juans of the gutter, at the enormous stout white felt hats of the market men, and at the big wrinkled blouses of the suburban gardeners, pressed close by the greasy rags of the street vagabonds.

However, I went in, and I ought to say that my

black coat soon had company. It is not a rare thing in Paris after midnight to see black coats without top-coats, and the wearers of them hungry enough to eat three-sous cabbage-soup. And the

soup is exquisite, moreover, — as odoriferous as a garden and smoking like the crater of a volcano. I had two helpings of it, although their cautious way of making the forks and spoons fast to the table with a chain incommoded me somewhat. I paid, and, my heart warmed with this beneficent repast, I went on my way toward the Latin quarter.

You can picture to yourself that return homeward: the poet trotting up the Rue de Tournon, his coat collar turned up and seeing dance before his wearied eyes the well-dressed figures of a fashionable reception, mingling with the famished silhouettes of the mob, and striking the snow from his heels against the threshold of the Hôtel du Sénat, while the

gleaming lanterns of a *coupé* illuminated the face of the structure and Dr. Ricord's coachman called out, "Gate, if you please!" Life in Paris is made up of contrasts.

"An evening thrown away," said my brother to me next morning. "You passed for the Prince of Wallachia, and your new volume got no show. But you have one chance left. You can make up for what you have lost when you make your 'visit of digestion.'" The digestion of a glass of water, — that was irony, indeed! I was two months bringing myself to the point of making that visit. One day, however, I took my chance. Beside her regular Wednesdays, Augustine Brohan received her more intimate friends on Sunday "mornings." I boldly went.

Now, at Paris a morning reception in proper form cannot decently begin before three or four o'clock in the afternoon. But I, in my artlessness, taking the "morning" seriously, presented myself at an unheard-of hour, and even then was afraid of being late.

"You come early, sir," said a little blond lad of five or six, in a velvet coat and embroidered breeches, who was making his way across the verdured garden on a large mechanical horse. This young man impressed me profoundly. I saluted the blond ringlets, the horse, the velvet coat, and the embroideries, and too timid to turn back, I went up.

Madam was just finishing her toilet; I should have to wait only half an hour. Finally, madam came in, squinted up her eyes, recognized the Wallachian prince, and for the sake of saying some-

thing, began: "You are not, then, at the race-course, Prince!" At the race-course? — I who had never seen either race or jockeys! That made me ashamed, a flash of feeling mounted from my heart to my brain, and then the sunshine, the perfumes of springtime from the garden entering through the open window, the absence of ceremony, the presence of this little smiling, good-hearted woman, — a thousand things gave me courage, and I opened my heart and told her all. I made a clean breast of it, — that I was neither Wallachian nor prince, only a poet; and I told her about my glass of Kirsch,

my melancholy departure, my provincial trepidation, my near-sightedness, my hopes, — all in my native accent. Augustine Brohan laughed and laughed. Suddenly some one rang.

"Good; my cavalrymen," she said.

"What cavalrymen?"

"Two cavalrymen whom they have sent to me from camp at Châlons, and who it seems have an

astonishing talent for playing comedy." I was going away.

"No, no; please stay. We are going to give the 'Lait d'Ânesse,' and you shall be the influential critic. Here, near me, on that divan!"

Two big fellows — timid, tight-laced, red-faced — now came in. One of them, I believe, is playing

in comedy somewhere now. They arranged a screen, I took my place, and the recital began.

"They don't do so very badly," said Augustine Brohan, in a whisper; "but what boots! My dear Mr. Critic, do you smell those boots?"

This intimacy with the most spirituelle comédienne in Paris carried me up into the seventh heaven. I

leaned back on the divan, shaking my head, and smiling with a confidential air. The seams of my coat cracked with joy.

The least of these details seems of enormous consequence to-day. But see how much depends upon the point of view. I told Sarcey the amusing history of my introduction into the fashionable world, and Sarcey one day repeated the story to

Augustine Brohan. Well, would you believe it, the ungrateful Augustine — whom, by the way, I have not seen for twenty years — solemnly affirmed that she knew neither me nor my books. She had forgotten everything, — everything that had held so large a place in my existence, — the broken glasses, the Prince of Wallachia, the recital of the "Lait d'Ânesse," and the cavalrymen's boots!

FATHER BALAGUÈRE'S CHRISTMAS FEAST

FATHER BALAGUERE'S CHRISTMAS FEAST

"Two stuffed turkeys, Garrigou?"

"Yes, your reverence, two magnificent turkeys, fairly crammed with truffles. I ought to know something about that, since I helped to stuff them myself. You would have said that the skin would burst open in roasting, it was stretched so."

"Holy Virgin! And I am so fond of truffles — Quick! my surplice, Garrigou. What beside the turkeys did you see in the kitchen?"

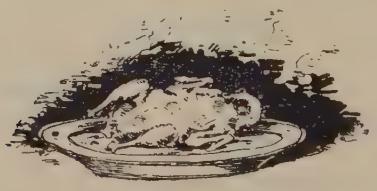
"Oh, all sorts of good things! Ever since noon we have been plucking pheasants, pewets, fat hens and grouse. The feathers were flying about everywhere. Then from the lake they have brought eels, goldfish, trout — "

"The trout — how large were the trout, Garrigou?"

"As large as that, your reverence, — enormous!"

"Oh, heavens! I can see them now! Have you put wine in the chalices?"

"Yes, your reverence; but it was useless, since you will have enough at the close of the midnight mass. If you could only see the dining-room in the château! — decanters flashing with wines of every tint. And the silver dishes, the gleaming epergnes, the flowers, the candelabra! — never was there such a feast. The marquis has invited all the people in the neighborhood. There will be a feast — forty at the table, without counting the bailiff and the notary. Ah, you are fortunate to be one of them,



your reverence! I have only smelled the turkeys, and the odor of those truffles follows me everywhere, — ah!"

"Well, well, my son, let us guard against the sin of gluttony, above all on the night of the Nativity. Go quickly and light the candles, and sound the first bell for the mass; midnight is almost here, and we must not be late."

This conversation took place one Christmas eve in the year of grace one thousand six hundred and something, between the reverend Father Balaguère,

ancient prior of the Barnabites, chaplain to the lords of Trinquelague, and his little clerk, Garrigou, or at least one whom he took for the little clerk Garrigou; for you must know that on this night the

devil had assumed the round face and vague features of the young sacristan in order that he might the better lead the reverend father into temptation, and cause him to commit the horrible sin of gluttony. Then when the supposed Garrigou (ho! ho!) rang the chapel bells, the reverend father hurried on his robe in the little sacristy of the château, and,

his mind being in a whirl with all these gastronomic details, repeated to himself while dressing, —

"Roast turkey — goldfish — trout as large as that!"

Without, the wind blew fiercely, scattering the music of the bells hither and thither, while lights appeared in the shadow of the flank of Mount Ventoux, on whose heights rose the ancient towers of Trinquelague. The lights were borne by the

farmers and their families on the way to attend midnight mass at the château. They mounted the slope, singing, in groups of five or six, the father in advance, lantern in hand, the women enveloped in great brown cloaks, beneath which the children pressed for shelter. Notwithstanding the hour and

the extreme cold, these honest folk stepped gayly on, sustained by the thought that, when the mass was over, there would be a table set for them in the kitchen, as had been the custom for many a year. From time to time, along the rough highway, the coach of some noble lord, preceded by torch-

bearers, glistened in the light, or finally a mule trotted by with bells jingling, and by the aid of their dim lanterns the villagers recognized their notary, saluting as he passed.

"Good-evening, good-evening, Master Arnoton."

"Good-evening, good-evening, my children."

The night was clear, the stars glittered coldly; the north wind nipped sharply, while a fine sleet blown over the clothing without melting, maintained the tradition of a white Christmas. At the top of the ascent the château rose sharply, an enormous mass of towers and gables, the chapel spire lifting into the blue-black sky, and a myriad little lights twinkling out, going and coming, gleaming forth at every window, seeming from below like burning bits of paper. Having passed the drawbridge and postern, it was necessary, in order to reach the chapel, to cross the outer court, now filled with carriages, valets, palanquins, all aglare from the torches and kitchen fires. The creaking of the spits, the sound of frying, the crash of crystal and silverware carried by in preparation for the repast, might be heard, while a heavy vapor, bearing the odor of roasting flesh, spicy herbs, and piquant sauces, whispered to the villagers, to the chaplain, to the notary, to everybody, —

"What a grand feast we shall have after mass!"

II

"Drelindin din! Drelindin din!"

THE midnight mass is begun. In the chapel of the château, a cathedral in miniature, with its intersecting arches and oaken wainscot rising to the

ceiling, the richest tapestry was displayed and every taper was lighted. And what a crowd of grand people! And what toilets! First of all, seated in the sculptured pews, facing the choir, was the lord

of Trinquelague, clad in salmon-tinted taffeta, and near him all the invited nobility. Opposite, on velvet-covered benches, was the dowager marchioness in a robe of flame-colored brocade, and the lady of Trinquelague wearing a head-dress of pearls after the approved court style. In the rear might be seen Thomas Arnoton, the bailiff, and Master Ambroy, the notary, clothed in black with long peruques and smoothly-shaven faces, two sombre points amid the splendor of gleaming silks and damasked brocades. Then came grand major-domos, pages, grooms, footmen, and Dame Barbe, with her keys hung upon a silver ring at her side; in the rear of all, the servants, villagers with their families; and, finally, by the doors, which they were constantly opening and closing with great circumspection, were the cooks, who ran in between two sauces to get a bit of the mass, bringing an odor of revelry into the church with its festal appearance, and warm with the blaze of so many lighted candles.

Was it the sight of those little white caps which so distracted the worthy priest? Or was it not rather Garrigou's bell, that diabolical little bell, which tinkled from the foot of the altar with infernal haste, and seemed to say continually, —

"Hurry! hurry! The sooner we are done, the sooner we shall be at the table."

The fact is that every time this diabolical little

bell sounded, the chaplain forgot his mass and thought only of his feast. He saw before him only the kitchens all in confusion, the furnaces roaring, the steam rising from the covered boilers, and in the steam two magnificent turkeys, stuffed to repletion with truffles.

Again he sees pass before him files of little pages bearing platters enveloped in tempting vapors, and

with them he enters the great hall already prepared for the banquet. Oh, joy! There is the immense table loaded and brilliant, peacocks adorned with their plumes, pheasants with reddish wings outspread, ruby-colored flasks, pyramids of fruit gleaming out from behind screens of evergreen, and those marvellous fish described by Garrigou (ah, well, yes, — Garrigou!) spread out upon a bed of herbs,

scales gleaming as when they first came from the water, and with sprigs of fragrant mint in their monster nostrils. So vivid was the vision of these dainties that to Father Balaguère it seemed as if all these wonderful dishes were served up before him upon the border of the altar-cloth, and two or three times, instead of *Dominus vobiscum*, he caught himself saying *benedicite*. Aside from these slight mistakes, the worthy man fulfilled his office conscientiously, without passing over a line or omitting a genuflexion, and all went well to the end of the

first mass; for you know on Christmas Eve the same priest celebrates three consecutive masses.

"One!" said the chaplain, with a sigh of relief; then, without losing a minute, he signed to his clerk, or to his supposed clerk, and —

"Drelindin din! Drelindin din!" —

the second mass has begun, and with it begins the sin of Father Balaguère. "Hurry! hurry!" cries the shrill little voice of Garrigou's bell, and this time the unfortunate priest, entirely possessed by the demon of gluttony, ran over the mass-book and devoured its pages with the avidity of an unduly excited appetite. Frantically he knelt, rose, made the signs of the cross and the genuflexions, all at once, to be through the sooner. Scarcely were his arms extended at the lesson before he struck his breast at the confiteor. Between the clerk and himself it was simply a question as to who could sputter the faster. Verses and responses were hustled after one another topsy-turvy. The words, half pronounced without opening the lips, since that required time, faded away in incomprehensible murmurs.

"*Oremus ps — ps —ps* — "

"*Mea culpa — pa — pa* — "

Like vintagers treading the grapes in the wine-press, so these two trampled through the Latin of the mass, which plashed up, so to say, on all sides.

"*Dom scum!*" said Father Balaguère.

"*Stutuo!*" replied Garrigou; and all the time that diabolical little bell rang in their ears, like the jingling strings hung upon post-horses to make them go the faster. It may be imagined that at this rate a mass is soon ended.

"Two!" said the chaplain, all out of breath; then, without taking time to fill his lungs, red, perspiring, he stumbled down the altar steps, and —

"Drelindin din! Drelindin din!"

the third mass was begun. Only a few moments more and the banquet hall will be reached; but, alas, proportionately as the feast approaches is the unfortunate Balaguère seized upon by a fever of impatience and greediness. The vision is clearer than ever; the goldfish, the roasted turkeys are there, there. He touches them; he — oh, heavens! The platters smoke, the wines send out a delicate bouquet; and still the little bell cries, "Hurry! hurry!"

But how hurry any faster? His lips scarcely move. He no longer pronounces the words. As the temptation becomes stronger he begins to leave out one verse; then two. Then the epistle is too long; he does not finish it, skims over the lesson, passes the credo without stopping, leaps over the pater, hastens to the end by bounds and jumps, precipitating himself into eternal perdition, always

followed by the infamous Garrigou (*vade retro, Satanas!*), who assists him with marvellous rapidity, relieves him of his chasuble, turns the leaves two at a time, turns the desk, reverses the chalices,

and incessantly rings the little bell, louder and louder, quicker and quicker.

But think of the congregation! Obliged to follow the priest without hearing a word of the mass, some rose while others knelt; some were seated while the others stood, and confusion reigned throughout the crowd of worshippers.

"The abbé goes too fast; I can't follow him," murmured the old dowager, shaking her head in anger. Master Arnoton, with his great steel-bowed spectacles on his nose, glared at his prayer-book to know where the deuce they were. But if the truth must

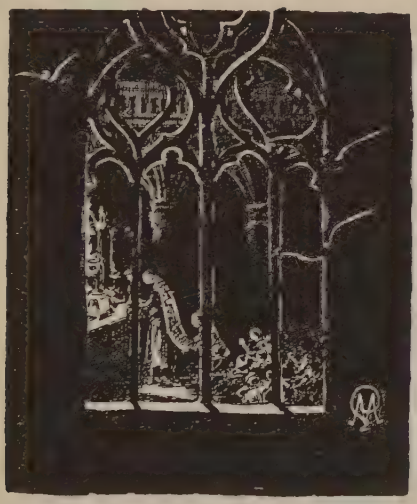
out, all these worthy people had also been thinking of the feast, and were not sorry that the mass was gone through with post haste; so when Father Balaguère, with radiant face, turned to his congregation and cried aloud, "*Ite, missa est*," the response came in a "*Deo gratias*" as joyous and long drawn out as if they were already seated at the banquet table and listened to the first toast.

III

Five minutes later the crowd of nobles was seated in the vast hall, the chaplain in the midst of them. The château, illuminated from turret to foundation, rang with songs, cries, laughter, uproar, while the venerable Father Balaguère planted his fork in the wing of a chicken, and drowned his remorse in lusty draughts of wine. He ate and drank so much, the poor holy man, that he died in the night of a terrible malady, without having even time to repent; then in the morning he reached heaven's gate with the odor of the feast still clinging to him, and I leave you to imagine how he was received; in fact, he heard this message: —

"You cannot enter into Paradise until you have celebrated in your own chapel three hundred Christmas masses, in the presence of all those who have sinned through your fault."

And that is the true legend of Father Balaguère as it is told in the land of olives. The château of Trinquelague no longer exists, but the chapel still holds itself erect at the top of Mount Ventoux, in a cluster of green oaks. The wind beats at the



shattered door, grass grows upon the threshold; the birds have built their nests at the corners of the altar and in the embrasure of the tall windows from which the stained glass has long disappeared. And yet it is certain that every year, at Christmas time, a ghostly light is seen wandering among the

ruins, and the peasants, on their way to mass and feast, behold the spectral chapel lighted by invisible candles which shine on in spite of the snow and wind.

Laugh if you will, but a vine-dresser of the neighborhood named Garrigue, probably a descendant of Garrigou, affirms that one Christmas eve, being somewhat tipsy, he lost his way on the mountain, toward Trinquelague; and this is what he saw. At eleven o'clock, nothing; all was silent, inanimate. Suddenly, about midnight, a chime sounded from the chapel tower, — a tiny chime, which seemed to come from the distance of many leagues. Then on the winding road Garrigue saw lights flashing, carried by vague, shadowy forms. Close by the chapel they went along laughing.

"Good-evening, Master Arnoton."

"Good-evening, good-evening, my children."

When every one had gone in, the vine-dresser, who was very brave, approached softly, and looking through an open window beheld a singular spectacle. All the people whom he had seen pass by were ranged about the choir in the ruined nave, as if the old pews were still there, — beautiful ladies in brocades and pearls, nobles bedizened with lace, peasants in flowered jackets such as our grandfathers wore, all having an ancient, faded, dusty, tired appearance. Now and then night birds, the

habitual guardians of the chapel, awakened by the lights, circled about the candles, whose flame mounted straight upward, as if it burned behind gauze; but what amused Garrigue the most was a certain personage with green, steel-bowed spectacles, who continually shook his great peruque, upon which a bird held itself upright, silently beating the air with its wings.

Within the circle a little old man, upon his knees, brandished a tongueless bell with all his might, while a priest in a black robe moved back and forth before the altar, reciting passages of which no one heard a word. There can be no doubt that it was Father Balaguère beginning the recital of his third mass.

THE NEW TEACHER

14

THE NEW TEACHER

Our little school has changed very much since Mr. Harmel went away. In his time we always had a few moments' grace when we got there in the morning. We used to gather around the stove to thaw out our fingers a little, and to shake off the snow or sleet that had gathered on our clothes. We talked softly together and showed one another what

we had in our lunch baskets. All this gave time for those who lived at a distance to arrive in season for the opening prayer and the roll-call. Now things are very different. You have to be there right on

the minute. That Prussian, Klotz, our new teacher, is not of the indulgent sort. At five minutes before eight he is sitting there as straight as a ramrod in his chair, with his big stick at his side, and woe to the tardy ones! So you hear the wooden shoes rattling over the little court-yard, and breathless voices at the door calling out, "Present!"

No sort of excuse seems to go down with this terrible Prussian. You may say to him, "I had to

help my mother carry the clothes to the laundry," or, "Father took me to market with him," — Mr. Klotz won't even listen to you. This miserable foreigner seems to think that we have neither homes nor families, but that we came into the world schoolboys, with our books under our arms, for the express purpose of learning German and getting ourselves whacked with a cudgel. Well, I got my share at

the beginning of the term. Our saw-mill is a good ways from the schoolhouse, and morning comes late in the winter. Finally, as I went home every night with marks on my hands, on my back, all over me, father decided to make me a boarder; but I had hard work to get used to that way of living.

Besides Mr. Klotz, the boarders had to reckon with Mrs. Klotz, who was a great deal meaner than he, and also the crowd of little Klotzes, who chased you on the stairs and called after you that Frenchmen are all beasts, — all beasts. Fortunately, when my mother came to see me every Sunday, she always brought me something good to eat, and as schoolboys are pretty fond of eating I was rather popular in the household.

The one I pitied most was Gaspard Hénin. He slept up in a little attic under the roof. He had been an orphan for two years, and his uncle, the miller, in order to get rid of him, had placed him there at school. When he first came he was a big boy of ten who looked as if he were fifteen, and had always been used to running about out of doors all day long, without thinking even of learning to read. So at first he did nothing but weep and sob, and was as sad as a chained dog; he was a good fellow though, with eyes as big and soft as a girl's. Through great patience, our former teacher, Mr. Harmel, had succeeded in taming him, and when

he went for a walk out into the country he always took Gaspard with him. The lad was delighted to get into the open air, to splash about in the brooks, and to feel the sun shining hotly on his swarthy face. But with Mr. Klotz everything was changed.

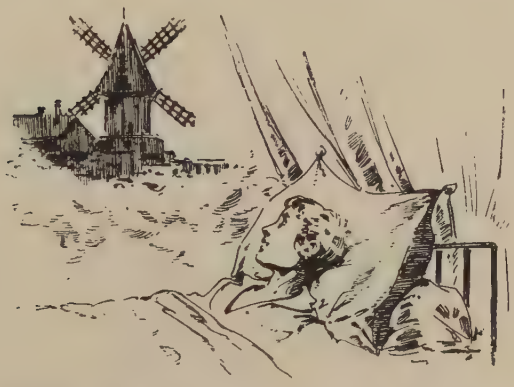
Poor Gaspard, who had hard enough work to master French, never could learn a word of German. He would muddle for hours at a time over the same declension, and you could see very well, by his knitted brows, that he was keeping at it through sheer stubbornness and anger, and not because he understood what he was doing. At every lesson the same scene was enacted. "Gaspard Hénin, get up!" Hénin would rise with a sulky look, bow over the top of his desk, and then sit down again without saying a word. Then Mr. Klotz would beat him and Mrs Klotz cut his rations. But that did n't make him learn any the faster. Often and often at night, going up to the little room in the attic, I used to say to him, —

"It 's no good crying, Gaspard! Do as I do. Better learn to read German, since those fellows have the whip hand of us."

"No," he would always say, "I don't want to.

I want to go away. I want to go back home." That was his fixed idea.

His early homesickness had come upon him stronger than ever, and in the morning, at dawn, when I saw him sitting on his bed with his eyes



staring, I understood that he was thinking of the mill-wheel that was starting up at this hour, and of the beautiful water running through the sluice-way in which he had dabbled all his life as a child. These things called to him from afar, and the teacher's brutalities only pushed him more ardently in the same direction and made him a complete savage. Sometimes after the cudgellings, seeing his blue eyes blaze with anger, I said to myself that if

I were in Mr. Klotz's place I should be a little careful. But that beast of a Klotz did n't care for anything. After the cudgellings, starvation; they would put him under arrest, and for long periods Gaspard

would not go out at all. However, one Sunday, as he had not had a breath of fresh air for two months, they let him go with us out on the common, beyond the village.

It was glorious weather, and we ran with all our might, playing prisoner's base, glad to feel the sharp

frost which made us think of snow and sliding. Gaspard held aloof, as he always did, at the edge of the woods, gathering leaves, cutting branches, and inventing games of his own. When we got ready to go back, no Gaspard was to be seen. We hunted; we called. He had got away. You ought to have seen the anger of Mr. Klotz. His big face turned purple, and his tongue tangled itself all up in German swear-words. But we could n't help being glad. After sending the others back to the village, he took two of the big boys, myself and another, and we set out for Hénin's mill. It began to get dark. The houses along the way were warm and cheerful with good fires and Sunday feasts, and as little flashes of light would strike out over the road, it seemed to me a good deal pleasanter to be under shelter and at table.

At Hénin's the mill was shut down, the gate was closed, and everybody, animals and people, had gone under cover. When one of the lads came to let us in, the horses and the sheep stirred in their straw, and on the perches of the poultry-house there was a great noise of fluttering wings and cries of alarm, as if all these dumb creatures had recognized Mr. Klotz. The mill hands were all at table in the kitchen, — the great, well-warmed and well-lighted kitchen, — where everything shone, from the clock-weights to the kettles. Between the miller, Hénin,

and his wife, Gaspard was sitting, at the head of the table, with the cheerful air of a household pet.

To explain his home-coming he had invented I know not what Prussian holiday, and they were

celebrating his arrival. When he saw Mr. Klotz, poor chap, he looked about him, seeking an open door through which he might escape; but the teacher put his heavy hand on the boy's shoulder and in a minute the uncle heard about the escape. Gaspard held his head up and did not look in the least like a pupil caught in a fault. Then he who so rarely spoke suddenly found his tongue, —

"Well, yes, I ran away! I don't want to go to school any more. I sha n't learn German, — language of pillagers and assassins. I want to talk French as my father and mother did." He trembled all over; it was terrible to see him.

"Be silent, Gaspard," said his uncle; but nothing could stop him.

"Very well; very well. Let him stay. We 'll come after him with the police;" and Mr. Klotz chuckled

There was a big knife on the table. Gaspard seized it, with a threatening gesture which made the teacher draw back. "All right; bring on your police!"

Then Uncle Hénin, who began to get frightened,

threw himself upon his nephew, tore the knife from his hands, and a dreadful scene followed. While Gaspard kept shouting, "I won't go! I won't go!" they tied him up with a rope. The poor fellow bit, foamed at the mouth, and called for his aunt, who had gone upstairs trembling and weeping. Then, while they were getting the wagon ready, Uncle Hénin wanted us to sit down and eat. I had no appetite myself, as you may easily imagine; but Mr. Klotz fed heartily, and all the time the miller was making

excuses for the things Gaspard had said about the teacher and about his Majesty the German Emperor. That 's what it is to be afraid of the police.

It was a sad journey back. Gaspard, stretched out in the bottom of the cart on the straw, like a sick sheep, said never a word. I thought he might be asleep, exhausted by his anger and tears, and I thought he must be very cold, bareheaded as he was

and without a cloak; but I dared to say nothing of this to the teacher. It was a sharp air. Mr. Klotz, with his fur cap pulled down over his ears, whipped up the horse and hummed a tune. The stars danced gayly in the strong wind and we went on

and on over the white and frosty road. We were already far from the mill. We could barely hear the murmur of the water in the distance, when a weak, tearful, supplicating voice rose from the bottom of the cart, and said in our Alsatian patois: "*Losso mi fort gen, Herr Klotz*" — "Please let me go, Mr. Klotz!" It was so sad a thing to hear that the tears came into my eyes. But Mr. Klotz smiled wickedly and went on humming and whipping his horse. In a few minutes the voice began again: "Please let me go, Mr. Klotz," always in the same low, soft, almost mechanical tone. Poor Gaspard! You would think that he was saying a prayer.

Finally the wagon stopped. We were there. Mrs. Klotz was waiting in front of the school-house with a lantern, and she was so angry with Gaspard Hénin that she wanted to beat him. But the Prussian stopped her, saying with an evil laugh, "We'll settle with him to-morrow. For to-night he has had enough."

Yes, the poor lad had had enough! His teeth rattled, he shook with fever. They were obliged to put him to bed. And I also seemed to have a fever that night, for hour after hour I could hear the rolling of the wagon-wheels and my poor friend saying in his sad voice, "Please let me go, Mr. Klotz!"

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